

Through Eyes in the Storm

Aspects of the Personal History of
Women Workers in the Industrial Revolution

Douglas A. Galbi
Research Associate
Centre for History and Economics
King's College, Cambridge CB2 1ST

23 April 1994
Revised, 4 November 1995

Abstract

Women's experience of child labour in factories in early nineteenth century England may have increased their psychological susceptibility, both in life-cycle and social-historical trajectories, to non-wage earning roles as mothers. This paper uses as a primary source an official examination into the punishment of a ten-year old female factory worker. From this text arises an interrelated collection of stories – the story of that girl and her mother in a psychological and relational struggle under the circumstances of their lives, an alternative story of how other girls coped, and an account of how these personal dynamics fit into the broader social history of women in nineteenth century England. This history offers important insights into the effect of deprivation and brutality on the development of gender.

Note: The published version of this paper is in *Social History*, v. 21 no. 2 (May 1996) pp. 142-59. This pre-publication draft is freely available from www.galbithink.org

The actions, motivations and psychology of working class females are often pushed to the side in accounts of the construction of gender in early nineteenth century England.* One such account directs attention to the interests of men in confining women to the home, to men's organizational advantages, and to the role of men's unions in advocating women's roles within the home.¹ Another account looks at how notions of skilled labour and family headship were linked and generalized to all working class men, thus making women into illusory dependents.² Accounts of the struggle for political representation describe how the language of radical political culture and its organizational practice situated men as political actors and left women in the domestic circle.³ While such accounts are useful for understanding how non-wage labor in one's own home became an idealized role for women, women in their appended positions lack psychological depth, and their positions and actions are interpreted in terms of the categories of others -- male workers, the middle class, or the male tradition of labour history.⁴ Thus we see the straining argument that Chartist women's acceptance of domesticity was a 'rhetorical gesture to answer vitriolic attacks on their activities from the middle class press' and that Chartist women

* I am grateful for comments and suggestions from Joan Galbi, David Landes, Alan MacFarlane, Emma Rothschild, John Shaw, and Gareth Stedman Jones.

¹Heidi Hartman, 'Capitalism, patriarchy, and job segregation by sex', *Signs*, 1:3 pt. 2 (Spring 1976), 136-69. Hartman in fact addresses the place of gender in female psychology. But she does not address the issue in the context of nineteenth century England, and the large literature influenced by her work has not generally taken up the historical dimension of the psychology of gender.

²Sally Alexander, 'Women, Class and Sexual Difference in the 1830s and 1840s: Some Reflections on the Writing of Feminist History', *History Workshop*, xviii (Spring 1984), 125-49.

³Dorothy Thompson, 'Women and Nineteenth Century Radical Politics: a Lost Dimension', in J. Mitchell and A. Oakley, (eds), *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* (Harmondsworth, 1976); Catherine Hall, 'The Tale of Samuel and Jemima: Gender and working class culture in early twentieth century England', in Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott (eds), *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (Milton Keynes, 1986), and Jutta Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement* (London, 1991).

⁴A prominent example of a work that gives women a distinctive place and language is Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (London, 1983).

developed a 'militant domesticity' that defined a mother's responsibilities 'not just as nurturing children in the home, but laboring to feed them and organizing to better their lives'.⁵

Substantial historical evidence about how working class women themselves worked through ideas of gender in early nineteenth century England is difficult to find. Understanding language as a constitutive element of personal perceptions implies that analysis of discourse can probe workers' self-understandings. One scholar has recently taken this linguistic turn into nineteenth century Lancashire. He noted in the course of seeking adult male workers' perceptions of the social order:

The search for what was present must, however, be acknowledged as exceedingly difficult; given the amount of research on the labour history of the period it is surprising how impressionistic are accounts of these perceptions.⁶

The problem with respect to women workers is even greater, for one cannot assume that the dominant discourse is their discourse. According to another scholar, in contrast to the 'universality and moralism of masculinist discourse on women's work', women workers testifying before the Factory Commission of 1833 presented 'concrete realities of their lives' and 'a rich discourse on the complexity of working women's experience'.⁷ This is an important observation, but it was made only in passing on to the discourse of male legislators, male unionists, and male spinners. The search for working women's autobiographies

⁵Anna Clark, 'The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: Gender, Language, and Class in the 1830's and 1840's', Journal of British Studies, 31 (Jan. 1992), 77.

⁶Patrick Joyce, Visions of the People: industrial England and the question of class 1848-1914 (Cambridge, 1991), 93.

⁷Marianna Valverde, 'Giving the Female a Domestic Turn: The Social, Legal and Moral Regulation of Women's Work in the British Cotton Mills, 1820-1850', Journal of Social History, 21:4 (June 1988), 625, 629. Note the contrast between women's voices heard here and the above depiction of Chartist women's activities.

from the early nineteenth century has also largely failed to find material that could provide a window on the perceptions of working class women as active, complex subjects.⁸ One goal of this paper is to present, interpret, and weave into history such material.

In Wigan in 1833 a factory commissioner examined Ellen Hootton, a 10 year old girl; Mary Hootton, her mother; and two men.⁹ I will use the evidence from this examination to construct an economic history and psychological analysis of Ellen's relationship with her mother. I will also use the evidence to explore how other girls in the factory, who were not like Ellen, perceived Ellen. Then I will draw upon the story of Ellen and the story of the girls who were not like Ellen to suggest that females' experience of child labour may have played an important role in shaping their response to the ideal of women as nurturing mothers and non-wage workers in the home, an ideal that gained currency in working class England toward the mid-nineteenth century. This history, while based on an empathetic reading of the limited available evidence, offers at least a dramatic argument for considering the psychological effects of child labour on human and social development.¹⁰

⁸David Vincent, Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom (London, 1981). The near absence of women's autobiography is attributed to subordination within the family depriving women of the self-confidence necessary for self-assertion in autobiography. See ibid., 8. One work that has made interesting use of women's autobiographies over a larger span of time and social position is Regenia Gagnier, Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain 1832-1920 (Oxford, 1991).

⁹This was a special examination in response to sensational public reports about incidents of cruel punishment in the mill in which Ellen Hootton worked. BPP, First Report of the Central Board of His Majesty's Commissioners for inquiring into the Employment of Children in Factories, 1833, XX, D.1 103-115. All the following references to the story of the Hoottons are from this source.

¹⁰On the history of representations of working class children in England, see Hugh Cunningham, The children of the poor: representations of childhood since the seventeenth century (Oxford, 1992). For a review of nineteenth century child labour legislation, see Frederick Hillersdon Keeling, Child Labour in the United Kingdom (London, 1914). For a review of the development of schooling, see Neil J. Smelser, Social paralysis and social change: British working-class education in the nineteenth century (Berkeley, U.S.A., 1991), especially Chapter 8.

* * *

Mary Hootton, Ellen's mother, was born in 1793 in Wigan and worked as a weaver there. The cross currents of the Industrial Revolution flowed strongly through her time, place, and occupation. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries Wigan, under firm guild control, was a centre of brass and copper foundries and was second only to London for pewter manufacturing. After 1740, the non-ferrous metal industries declined sharply along with other small workshop industries. Coal and cotton grew up to form the new core of the Wigan economy.¹¹

From the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century the coal and cotton industries in Wigan were transformed from cottage industries to industries with numerous large firms. In the mid-eighteenth century, work groups in both industries were small, and they were typically organized around the family with the women and children working with the men.¹² The growing demand for coal in the Northwest in the late eighteenth century stimulated an expansion of coal mining. In the 1770s a canal linked Wigan to Liverpool, and private rail lines were put down to connect to the canal. These developments, along with advances in mining technology, were associated with growth in the number and average size of mines, and with the development of a coal mining labour force and labour market detached from the family.¹³

¹¹John Langton, Geographical Change and Industrial Revolution (Cambridge, 1979), 52-3, 98, 177, 181-2.

¹²With respect to coal, see D. Anderson, The Orrell Coalfield (Buxton, 1975), 63, 123, and C.H.A. Townley, F.D. Smith, and J.A. Peden, The Industrial Railways of the Wigan Coalfield, 2 parts (Cheltenham, 1991-2) part i, 6. With respect to cotton, see Duncan Bythell, The Handloom Weavers (Cambridge, 1969), 36-9.

¹³The number of colliers at two collieries in the Wigan area grew from about 10 colliers per colliery in 1780 to about 40 each in 1815, and the number of hewers recorded in land tax assessments increased fivefold between 1782 and 1799. See Anderson, op. cit., 123, and Langton, op. cit., 194.

The transition from cottage industry to large-scale enterprise was more painful in the cotton industry. The expansion of factory spinning of cotton in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth stimulated the demand for handloom weavers. In 1799 an observer in Wigan noted, 'the demand for manufactured goods is great, and were it possible to make one weaver into two they might be employed'.¹⁴ However, after about 1820 the expansion of factory-based power weaving led to a steady deterioration in handloom weavers' earnings and to the eventual and painful elimination of their occupation.¹⁵

The lives of Ellen and Mary Hootton were caught up in the handloom weavers' deteriorating position. Ellen, Mary's daughter, was born out of wedlock in 1822 or 1823. Her father, like Mary, was a weaver. Under an order placed on the father, Mary received 1s.6d. a week for child support until Ellen was four years old. She then received 1s. a week until Ellen was seven and a half, at which time payments stopped. These reductions may relate to the father's worsening economic position: 1826 and 1829 were particularly difficult years for weavers, with piece rates plummeting 33% and 29% respectively.¹⁶ Mary, who was also a weaver, also experienced the same blows, and soon after support payments stopped Mary sent Ellen into a factory. According to Ellen, she began working in the factory when she 'wasn't quite eight', while her mother, perhaps with some awareness of the Factory Act of 1819, said that Ellen began work 'close upon nine years old'.¹⁷

¹⁴Bythell, *op. cit.*, 50.

¹⁵John S. Lyons, 'Family Response to Economic Decline: Handloom Weavers in early Nineteenth-Century Lancashire' in Robert L. Ransom, Peter H. Lindert, and Richard Sutch (eds) *Research in Economic History*, Vol. 12 (London, 1989).

¹⁶*ibid.* Table 1, 51. Piece rates rose in 1827 and 1830 11% and 31% respectively. Nonetheless, piece rates in 1830 were only 63% of the average rates for 1822-3.

¹⁷Under the Factory Act of 1819, children could be employed only from nine years of age. See Maurice Walton Thomas, *The Early Factory Legislation* (Leigh-on-Sea, 1948), 25-7.

We know that about 1831 Mary Hootton was earning 5s. a week. Mary worked on a dandy-loom in a dandy-loom shed, a type of work that represented an opportunity to earn higher wages than on an ordinary hand-loom in exchange for regular hours and close supervision.¹⁸ Mary's earnings in the dandy-loom shed were about equal to those for handloom weavers at the time.¹⁹ Thus while Mary may have been more ambitious than other weavers in seeking to enhance her earnings, she apparently suffered from other relative disadvantages.²⁰

Mary's earnings did not leave much room for survival. The cost of twelve pounds of oatmeal was about 1s.10d.²¹ Rent and taxes for a single spinner in Wigan were 1s.6d., while fuel, soap, and candles amounted to 1s.2d.²² Moreover, in the course of her personal problems that developed over the next two years, Mary's earnings fell from 5s. a week to 3s. a week. Nonetheless, she was not able to get any support from the parish because of her earnings.

The potential earnings of Ellen, the nine year old daughter, were very significant relative to those of Mary, her forty-one year old mother.²³ As her mother noted with apparent dismay, during Ellen's first twenty weeks in the factory she had to be 'taught' the work and was not paid. After her learning period, her earnings began at 10 1/2d. a week for working half of a side of a spinning machine. They rose as she took on more work: 1s.9d. a week for a

¹⁸Bythell, op. cit., 34, 83.

¹⁹ ibid., 34.

²⁰Mary noted that Ellen's father was a 'weaver by trade'. This suggests that he was no longer weaving, a further indication of weavers' difficulties in Wigan. As a woman, Mary's opportunities for market work outside of weaving were more limited than her husband's.

²¹ibid., Appendix 2, Table 1, 278.

²² BPP, Reports from Assistant Hand-Loom Weavers Commissioners, 1840, XXIV, 582-3. The data pertains to male weavers in 1837.

²³According to Ellen her age was nine; when asked how old she is, she said, 'I shall be ten the 4th of August'. Her mother, on the other hand, said, 'She is going of eleven; will be eleven next August'. I tend to find Ellen's testimony more convincing. See above.

side, and 2s 7 1/2d. for a side and a half. If she had been able to take on two sides, as other girls did, she could have earned 3s. 6d. a week. This amount was more than her mother earned per week in 1833.

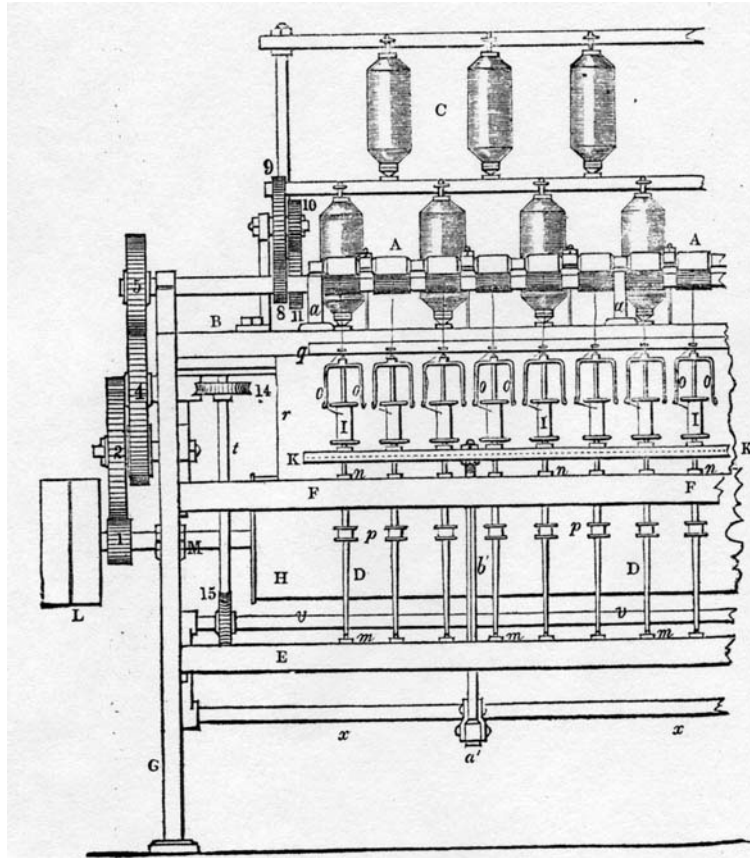


Figure 1

While Ellen's potential earnings were relatively high, her conditions of work were horrendous. On weekdays she began work in the factory at 5:30 a.m. and finished at 8 p.m. Included in this period were a thirty-five minute break for breakfast and a fifty-five minute break for dinner. On Saturday she worked about another nine hours. The factory in which she worked was relatively small, and the evidence suggests that it had poor quality machinery.²⁴

²⁴The factory, which used throstles for spinning, turned out threads (6-20 counts) that were coarser than threads typically produced on that kind of machinery at that time. Coarser threads were less valued. See Isaac Cohen, American Management and British Labor (Westport, 1990), 34-5. Moreover, the factory employed 70 workers and was powered by a 14 horsepower steam engine. The size of the factory was smaller and the level of horsepower

Figure 1 shows a drawing of the spinning machine with its columns of bars and threads.²⁵ Ellen stood in front of this machine, like a prisoner looking through cell bars, and tied up any of the threads that broke. She had trouble with this task and complained to her mother that she 'couldn't keep her ends up'.

Ellen refused to identify with her role as a wage earner in the factory and sought to escape or subvert it. She said that her mother put her to work in the factory, that her mother 'gets' her wages, and when asked how long she had been in the factory she said she didn't remember, but 'my mother will know how long I worked better than I'. Ellen did not show pride in her ability to provide her mother with earnings comparable to her mother's own earnings.²⁶ On the contrary, many times she tried to run away from the factory.²⁷ One time she was missing for a whole day, and she did not come home until nine o'clock at night. Another time she stole 6 1/2d. from a box that her mother had left open at home. Her mother complained, 'It was all I had to make my breakfast on, and I was forced to borrow'. Ellen's mother also recounted that Ellen stole a brass box and about 10d. from Betty Chapman, another worker in the factory. Ellen herself denied stealing anything. Ellen's mother was not able to get the money back from Ellen and instead had to repay Betty Chapman out of money from Ellen's wages. Ellen's capacity for defiance shows in her response to the examiner's brow-beating inquiries:

per worker lower than in other coarse spinning factories in Wigan. See BPP, Factory Inspectors' Reports, December 1841, 1842, XII, 41. The factory was built before 1823, probably a considerable amount of time before. See First Report, op. cit., D.1 283.

²⁵The drawing is from Andrew Ure, The Cotton Manufactures of Great Britain, 2 vols. (London, 1836), i, 126.

²⁶Cf. Vincent, Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom, 82. See below.

²⁷Mary said that Ellen ran away 'many times'. When twenty times was suggested she said it was less than that; when ten times was suggested she said, 'I dare say it were ten'. She also indicated that the overlooker had punished Ellen in a distinctive way more than five times. The overlooker, on the other hand, said that Ellen ran away three or four times, and that he had punished her two or three times.

How came you to tell me in the morning you never stole any thing; what made you tell me such a lie, when I told you to tell the truth? --(*After a long pause.*) -- What have you got to say (*No answer.*) -- Whose brass box was it you stole; what was her name? -- (*A long pause, and the question repeated twenty or thirty times.*) -- Betty Chapman's.

Mary was angry and frustrated with her daughter Ellen's behaviour. She repeatedly called Ellen 'stupid'. She said that Ellen was 'a very naughty stupid girl', that 'she was very stupid, and wouldn't heed when she was spoken to'. Mary said that she beat Ellen many times and that Ellen deserved punishment from the overlooker. In the instances when Ellen ran away from the mill, Mary brought her back and put her back to work.

Mary was not a sadist, not even merely a struggling, unfeeling parent. Ellen was her only child.²⁸ She cried when two outsiders came to inquire about how Ellen was treated. This was not just a grief generated by exposure to others; Mary said that other inquirers didn't see her cry, but 'I cries many a time'. Ellen's behaviour also indicates that Ellen sensed that her mother had an emotional commitment to her. Ellen cried to Mary about her punishment in the mill. One morning when Ellen was afraid that she was going to be punished, she begged her mother, who had taken her to work, to stay with her at work. Yet when the examiner asked Ellen if she had been hurt when the overlooker beat her, she replied without emotion, 'No; but it made my head sore with his hands'. The evidence suggests that Mary both loved Ellen and desperately wanted her to earn money as a good worker in the factory.²⁹

²⁸In early nineteenth century England, the father had the right to custody of his child. See Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, Children in English Society, 2 vols. (London, 1973), i, 362-76. The fact that Mary received custody of Ellen suggests that she wanted Ellen.

²⁹Michael Anderson, Family Structures in Nineteenth Century Lancashire (Cambridge, 1971), 76-8, presents additional evidence that working class parents loved their children despite difficult circumstances. Linda Pollack, in Forgotten children: parent-child relations from 1500 to 1900 (Cambridge, 1983), and A lasting relationship: parents and children over

The strain of this conjuncture had an important effect on Mary's perceptions of her weaknesses and needs. Consider the following exchange between Ellen and the examiner.

Were you ever in a church in your life -- No.

Do you ever say your prayers? -- Yes

Who to? -- My mother.

What do you say? -- Our father, &c.

[Comment: Here the child repeated the Lord's Prayer, but not correctly.]

Do you ever say any other prayer? -- No.

How often do you say that? -- Every night.

Apparently every night Ellen, who had never been in a church, said the 'Our Father...' to her mother Mary. When asked whether her father was dead, Ellen said, 'I have no father'. Her father was alive, but he was not married to her mother, did not live with her mother, and no longer contributed to his daughter's support. Yet a heavenly Father whose will would be done, who would give daily bread and deliver Ellen from evil, would give Mary much more space to love Ellen. Part of Mary's burden in her relationship with her daughter was the burden of enforcing the laws of survival. Because she loved her daughter, she seems to have been seeking a way to gain more freedom to express that love.

But, among other things, Ellen was not able to recite the prayer correctly. Mary tried to get the overlooker to discipline her daughter: '...I asked him to tutor her as he would his own, as she wouldn't heed me'. Mary was so frustrated that love and money no longer mattered. According to the overlooker:

three centuries (London, 1987), presents a forceful critique of the 'invention of childhood' thesis and extensive documentation that middle class parents did love and care for their children.

Her mother has told me to take her to myself, and have her earnings, and keep her on bread and water, and put a lock of straw in one corner of the room for her to lie on.

When the examiner recalled Mary for further questioning, he asked her:

Did you ever tell him [the overlooker] to take her, and that he might have her earnings, and to give her bread and water, and a lock of straw to lie on?

She responded:

I told him to take her, and he might have her earnings, and let her lie in one corner of his room all night, to frighten her. I never said a lock of straw.

This is an extraordinary response. Imagine the examiner's eyes growing bigger and a look of horror appearing on his face as the mother apparently confirmed the wild claim that the overlooker made. She, perhaps sensing the examiner's judgement of her, then appended an explanation and denied a detail: '...to frighten her. I never said a lock of straw'.

While Mary construed the overlooker as a father figure, the overlooker himself presented his relationship with Mary and Ellen as being largely impersonal and procedural. He had hired Ellen to do work. When asked why he beat Ellen, he explained that her 'parents' had told him to do so. When asked if he knew Ellen's father, he said no and clarified that his reference to Ellen's parents meant her mother. When asked what 'sort of woman' is Ellen's mother, he responded that he didn't know, for he had 'very little to do with her'. He then went on to offer some vague gossip about her -- 'What folk tell me is, that she is very idle, and a bad-behaved woman too'. The overlooker in his personal capacity seems even farther away than Heaven as a place to look for a father for Ellen. But the overlooker was very close to Mary as a figure of

economic law. He governed the rules of who, how, and how much for child wage earners. These are rules that Mary desperately needed Ellen to follow.

Ellen was a 'bad' girl. She refused to accept the rules that other factory girls followed. How did 'good' girls think and behave? A recent study of nineteenth-century working class autobiographies argued:

Not unnaturally, the small child felt very proud of his capacity to contribute to the family income.... Two important consequences flowed from the way in which the young child labourers assessed the value of their work. In the first instance, the financial interdependence of the members of the family economy and the way this was known and accepted by children as young as seven or eight, was clearly a force which bound together, emotionally as well as materially, the family as a whole.... The second consequence was that as long as they received some support from their family economy in return for their financial contribution, the children were capable of containing their suffering within the framework of the values of security and dependence which we have been examining.³⁰

This is an account of a good child. It is also an account of a male child relating to a generalized family.³¹ To address the issues of this paper, we need to consider differences between girls and boys.

³⁰Vincent, *op. cit.*, 82-3.

³¹Vincent hedges the above description, noting, '...where the family economy proved incapable of providing its dependent members with security and training...the child came to see his earnings as a measure...of his exploitation as an individual worker in the market'. He asserts that weak 'support functions' of the family economy led to children's feelings of isolation and vulnerability, and that factories emptied child labor 'of what positive value it had possessed'. *ibid.*, 84-6. He provides little evidence to support these assertions. Children's work in the factories was a significant source of training, and in general working class families did not have much security. On security see *ibid.*, 68-9, and Anderson, *op. cit.*, 29-32; on the training of children in factories see Douglas Galbi, 'Child Labor in the Early English Factories', paper presented at the American Economic Association Conference (Boston, 1994). Moreover, exploited child laborers did not perceive themselves as isolated individuals. See below.

Such differences may not matter. In Gentleman's Magazine of 1795 a middle-class observer presented a laudatory account of a girl's work in a coal mine a few miles away from Wigan.³² In the 1780s the girl's father, a coal miner, took his nine year old daughter to work in the mine. There she worked underground, dragging coal from the hewers to the surface, and earned, along with her seven year old brother, seven shillings a week for their parents. Her father was subsequently killed in an accident in the mine, and her mother, who worked in the home, went insane with grief. But the girl supported her mother and her little brothers with her work; at age fifteen she brought home 3s. 6d. a day by working a double shift underground. The girl's actions suggest trans-gender identification and substitution; the girl took her father's place as a worker. The story preserved conventional understandings of family for its readers, while presenting a simple substitution at a suitable class distance.

A deeper analysis of daughters' wage work in early nineteenth century England suggests that its primary significance was neither in subjection to the father nor in emulation of him. A mother's legal claim to her daughter was subordinate to the father's, but a daughter seemed to have been more hers than his in an emotional and relational sense.³³ This probably meant that when the father did not work immediately with the girl, the mother was responsible for putting the girl to work and collecting her wages. The examiners' questions and the witnesses' testimony in the factory investigations of 1833 generally address children's parents in terms of the undifferentiated category 'parents', but when specific circumstances are addressed, mothers come to the fore more

³²Gentleman's Magazine, 65 part 1 (March 1795), 197-9, and 68 part 2 (Dec. 1798), 1030-1.

³³For the legal position of mothers, see Pinchbeck and Hewitt, Children in English Society, 362-76. Anderson argues that mothers had closer emotional bonds to their children than did fathers. See Anderson, op. cit., 77.

often than fathers.³⁴ One witness noted that parents sometimes borrowed money against their children's earnings: 'One woman had let out both her children for 10s., and another had sold hers for a year, but for what sum she did not mention'.³⁵ A seventeen year old girl working in Manchester noted with a tone of resentment that her mother receives her wages: 'always has had 'em; has 'em now'.³⁶ A worker in a mill working at night explained that it was difficult to stay awake at night; he and a girl working under him sometimes fell asleep, and one would wake the other up. One time after the girl had fallen asleep, he called to her and she cried out, confused, 'Mother, it's not time to go to the factory yet'.³⁷

A girl's labour was a central part of her understanding of herself and of her relationship with her mother.³⁸ 'I hope I never shall get tired of work. My mother always brought me up to be a good worker', said a twelve year old girl working in a brickyard in Staffordshire in the middle of the nineteenth century.³⁹ A woman who had worked about thirty years in factories, who as a girl had wanted to leave home to work as a domestic servant but had gone to work in a factory because 'my mother was ill, and I was obliged to be at home', explained that 'good children come from good mothers'.⁴⁰ In contrast to the fleeting glimpse we see of her childhood preference to work as a servant, she told the interviewer, 'I have noticed, in my own neighbourhood, that young women brought up in factories, against those that are brought up as servants, seem to

³⁴My reading of the factory reports was limited to those from Lancashire. The analysis of mid-nineteenth century worker-girls' stories in Carolyn Steedman, *The Tidy House* (London, 1982), 114-127, also suggests that the primary significance of girls' work was in the context of their relationship with their mother.

³⁵*First Report, op. cit.*, XXI, 43.

³⁶*ibid.*, XX, D.1 76.

³⁷BPP, *Factories Inquiry Commission Supplementary Report Part I*, XIX, D.1 167.

³⁸Steedman, *op. cit.*, 120.

³⁹*ibid.*, original source not given.

⁴⁰*First Report, op. cit.*, XX D.1 86.

take more care of their houses and children, and to be more industrious, than the other class....⁴¹ An eight year old girl trading watercress on a street in London two decades later presented herself as 'a worker, a good and helpful little girl, a source of income'.⁴² Her story of herself was an account of her work, and in this story her mother was a central figure; her father -- a silent one.⁴³ Good little girls were wage earners who identified with their mothers, who responded to their mothers and sought to please them.⁴⁴

How did the other girls in the factory view Ellen? We know that Ellen worked in a spinning room with about twenty-five workers, all under the supervision of one overlooker. Of these workers, at most three were women over age eighteen, about ten were children between twelve and eighteen, and the rest were children under twelve. More than half the children were probably girls.⁴⁵ The examiner did not question any of Ellen's co-workers. Nonetheless, important insights follow from recognizing that they formed the audience for a strange punishment that the overlooker imposed on Ellen.

The early English factories were the scene of considerable brutality. One fearsome tool of abuse was a wooden rod two or three yards long, about an inch and a half in diameter, with an iron pike at the end. It was a roller taken

⁴¹ibid., 84.

⁴²Carolyn Steedman, Landscape for a Good Woman (London, 1986), 136.

⁴³ibid., 135-6. According to the girl, '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 he says kind things to me for he hardly ever speaks'. Quoted in loc. cit. from Henry Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor, 4 vols. (London, 1851), i, 151-2.

⁴⁴For an analysis and critiques of how mothers shape their children, see Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley, 1978), Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur (New York, 1976), and Alice Miller, The drama of being a child and the search for the true self (London, 1987). As Chodorow notes (44), it is a mistake to assume that psychic structures are established only up to age five. Girls in particular tend to maintain elements of the primary relationship with their mother well past infancy. Thus psychoanalytic theory does not imply the psychological insignificance of child labor.

⁴⁵In a survey of Lancashire cotton mills in 1833, among workers under 18 in throstle spinning (the kind of spinning that took place in the factory considered here) there were 36% more girls than boys. Factories Inquiry Sup. Rep., op. cit., XIX, D.1, Supplement B.

off the top of a machine for preparing cotton. As punishment children got their heads hit with it. Children were also beaten with bobbins and flogged with straps similar to those that drove the machinery. Some adult operatives and overlookers did not look beyond themselves for tools of abuse. They kicked children, struck them with clenched fist, and yanked children's hair and ears.⁴⁶

A punishment that the overlooker imposed on Ellen was of a very different sort. One morning, after the workers returned from breakfast, the overlooker tied iron weights to Ellen's back and made her walk back and forth through the throstle room 'with a cap on her head and a stick in her hand', according to the overlooker's nonchalant addition under the examiner's direct questioning. Mary had earlier presented a more dramatic description of Ellen's accoutrements; according to her, Ellen walked, bent forward, 'with a bit of a Scotch cap, and a sword in her hand'. The overlooker said that the weights tied to Ellen's back did not cause her pain: 'she laughed at them, and made fun of the joke'. Mary, however, said that the weights seemed to cause Ellen pain, and she said that at home Ellen cried and complained that her shoulders ached.

A significant share of the audience for this punishment -- the other workers -- apparently had little sympathy for Ellen. They teased Ellen -- 'plucked' -- as she went by, and she fell down fighting with them and hitting them with the stick. Mary noted twice, without specific prompting from the examiner, that the point of the punishment was to 'shame' Ellen. The overlooker and Ellen herself also agreed that her walking through the mill with the weights on her back was to 'expose' her to the other children. Thus to most of the children in the room, Ellen was probably a bad girl rather than a heroic rebel.

⁴⁶BPP, Sadler Commission Report, 1831-32, XV, 96, 449, and passim.

Direct evidence provides only a small clue about the significance of gender in the other children's reaction to Ellen. Three boys were punished for running away, while there is no mention of girls, other than Ellen, running away. Since the punishment for running away was public, the experience of punishment for running away provided a dimension in which Ellen would have been grouped with these boys in the eyes of others in the mill. This situation may have provided a basis for a particular hostility of girls toward Ellen.

To understand the other children's reaction, the nature of Ellen's punishment needs to be carefully considered. The examiner concluded that the weighting of Ellen was an 'ignorant, stupid device of [the overlooker's] to cure the girl of running away, but not cruelly intended'. Others presented a different picture. A Manchester spinner linked Ellen's punishment to slavery, and Richard Oastler, a fiery Tory opponent of child labor, compared the punishment of Ellen to the Russians making the Poles carry iron weights in their exile to Siberia. These statements were reported in Manchester, Bolton, and London newspapers, and in fact motivated the special examination. Oastler apparently was referring to events after the unsuccessful Polish revolt against their Russian rulers in 1831. He may have been drawing from the widely-read poetry of Adam Mickiewicz, a leading Polish poet, who offered the following image of the Poles' exile:

Small boys, wasted and worn, all with their heads shaved, with chains on their legs. The youngest, a child of ten years old, complained, poor child! that he could not lift his chain, and he showed his bare, bleeding leg. The head of the police came up, and looked at the chain: 'Ten pounds. It agrees with the prescribed weight'.⁴⁷

⁴⁷See Monica Gardner, Adam Mickiewicz, The National Poet of Poland (New York, 1911), 97-8.

Ellen's punishment, however, meant more than simply an example of cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity. An account of a parish apprentice's life included an incident of weights being tied to a boy's body. This weighting was done as a malicious 'sport' in the context of an array of other sadistic tortures.⁴⁸ In contrast, tying weights to Ellen's back and having her walk around the room with a cap on her head and a stick in her hand has a theatrical dimension. The overlooker had fastened weights to a boy's leg and made the boy walk around the room dragging the weight. Why was there the extra embellishment for Ellen?

Consider the cap that the overlooker placed on Ellen's head. A cap known as the 'cap of liberty' was an important prop in working class demonstrations in the early nineteenth century.⁴⁹ While liberty was regularly portrayed in the eighteenth century as a woman wearing a cap and holding a spear, in working class protests in Lancashire in the early nineteenth century the cap of liberty was often held up on a stick rather than worn on the head.⁵⁰ Mary described the cap that Ellen wore as 'a bit of a Scotch cap'. She probably was referring to a flat-top cap also known as a Tam O'Shanter, after a famous character who wore such a cap in a cherished poem of Robert Burns.⁵¹ Something resembling a flat, floppy cap with a tight head band probably could

⁴⁸See John Brown, A Memoir of Robert Blincoe (Manchester, 1832), 39-40.

⁴⁹For a discussion and analysis of the cap of liberty, see James Epstein, 'Understanding the Cap of Liberty: Symbolic Practice and Social Conflict in Early Nineteenth-Century England', cxxii, Past & Present (Feb. 1989), 75-118.

⁵⁰ibid., 84,87,97.

⁵¹For depictions of the cap, see 'Tam O'Shanter 'getting fou and unco happy', painting by John Burnet (1784-1868), reproduced in James Barke (ed.), Poems and Songs of Robert Burns (London, 1955), 416. See also the engravings of Ayr, Market Cross, and of Shanter Farm and Bay, Carrick, from paintings of David Octavius Hill (1802-1870), an artist known for his accurate and unsentimental depictions, and who was an early experimenter with the calotype, a negative-based photographic process. The engravings are reproduced in In the Land O' Burns (Glasgow, 1981), 69,71. That the cap was a common piece of Scottish working class dress in the early nineteenth century is further suggested by its appearance in the portrait 'John Cowper, an Edinburgh Beggar, 1808' attrib. to William Lizars, reproduced in Duncan Macmillan, Scottish Art 1460-1990 (Edinburgh, 1990), 181.

have been created with rags lying around the factory. However, the cap of liberty was conical -- less 'Scottish' and perhaps harder to make.⁵² These physical details suggest that the cap that the overlooker placed on Ellen's head did not resemble a cap of liberty.

At an interpretive level, putting weights on Ellen's back and a cap of liberty on her head would seem to be mocking working class political aspirations. One might not expect such an attack from an overlooker from the working class. Moreover, the display of caps of liberty died down in the late 1820s, while Ellen's punishment occurred in 1833.⁵³ These points further indicate that the cap put on Ellen's head was probably not an allusion to a cap of liberty.

The mines around Wigan provide a more plausible referent for a weighted girl with a cap and a stick. There at least until 1842 women and girls worked underground, pulling sleds of coal to the surface.⁵⁴ Figure 2 shows an example of a female doing this kind of work.⁵⁵ The weights on Ellen's back were 'tied by two bands over her shoulders and across the waist', exactly like the harnesses that were used to pull coal sleds. More significantly, the 'Scotch cap' that the overlooker put on Ellen was probably like the caps that the females in the mines wore to protect their hair.⁵⁶ And at least female coal bearers in Scotland sometimes used sticks to help make their way up the mine-shaft.⁵⁷ It is not difficult to believe that the overlooker, who had worked in

⁵²For a clear picture of a 'bonnet de la liberte', see Jennifer Harris, 'The Red Cap of Liberty', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, xiv no. 3 (Spring 1981), 284.

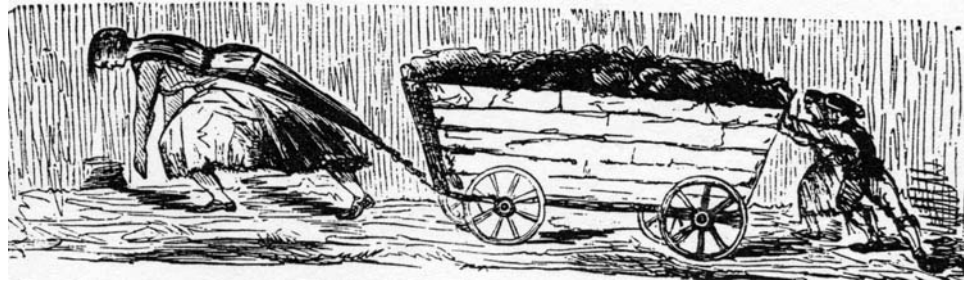
⁵³Epstein, *op. cit.*, 115.

⁵⁴P.E.H. Hair, 'Lancashire collier girl', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, cxx, (1968), 82.

⁵⁵BPP, *Inquiry into Conditions in Mines*, 1842, XVI, 385. The sketches are from mines in the east of Scotland. The pulling of coal was done in a similar way in Wigan. See Anderson, *op. cit.*, 62-3.

⁵⁶The cap was generally flat with a band tight to the head. See *Mines, op. cit.*, XVII, 161, John., *op. cit.*, 182-3, and Diana de Marly, *Working Dress* (London, 1986), 62.

⁵⁷John, *op. cit.*, 22.



Wigan for more than six years prior to 1833, was familiar with how females worked in the mines.⁵⁸ The best interpretation of Ellen's peculiar punishment is that the overlooker was placing her in the position of a girl in the mines.

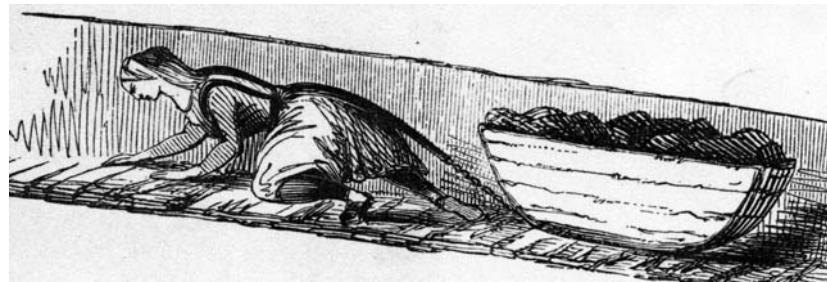


Figure 2

Female work in the mines contrasted sharply with gender ideals emerging in nineteenth century England. The work was dirty, physically demanding, and without the rigid ordering of time and space found in the factories. The workers often worked partly undressed, and the females around Wigan, like the males, wore trousers.⁵⁹ The Children's Employment Commission of 1842 sensationalized these facts. By the 1860s selling photographs of coal-mining

⁵⁸A cotton mill and a coal mine were often part of a single landowner's estate. See *ibid.*, 106, and *The History of the British Coal Industry*, 4 vols., Michael W. Flinn, xx, 1700-1830: *The Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1984) 52. The owner of the cotton mill in which Ellen worked was William Eccles. See BPP, *Factories Inquiry Commission*, Part II, 1834, XX, D.1 283. In 1841 a Mr. Eccles was an owner, with Mr. Case, of the Douglass Bank mine in Wigan. See *Mines*, *op. cit.*, 1842 (382), XVII, 194. Moreover, in 1845 Richard Eccles, a master cotton spinner in Wigan, leased part of his Walthew House Estate to a coal mine owner who wanted to use the Clarke wagon road, part of which ran over Mr. Eccles' land. The Clarke wagon road was in 1812 the path of the 'Yorkshire Horse', one of the first steam locomotives in England. This engine, which must have been an impressive sight, apparently continued operating up to the 1830's. See Anderson, *op. cit.*, 11-117, and Townley, Smith, and Peden, *op. cit.*, 58-60. I suspect that the reference to Richard Eccles is a mistake, and that it was in fact William Eccles. The important point is that coal mining and cotton spinning had significant visible connections.

⁵⁹*ibid.*, 180-181. Note that trousers were also worn in Burnley. See *Mines*, *op. cit.*, 1842 XV, 24.

women in their work clothes was a brisk business in Wigan, and gawkers at one major mine were apparently becoming so bothersome that it forbade visitors.⁶⁰ While females who worked in the mines were not social outcasts, there is good evidence that at least by the second half of the nineteenth century factory girls felt superior to girls in the mines.⁶¹

The overlooker's choice of Ellen's punishment indicates attitudes of females in the factories towards females who worked in the mines. In order to shame Ellen, the overlooker needed to find a punishment that would resonate strongly with her peers, the most important of which were probably the other girls in the room. An autobiography of a female factory worker in early nineteenth century Derbyshire provides additional evidence of how overlookers drew upon gender ideals in formulating punishments.⁶² After a horrendous account of beatings which caused the deaths of two girls and caused another girl to go insane, this worker noted:

They were in the habit of cutting off the hair of all who were caught speaking to any of the lads. This headshaving was dreadful punishment. We were more afraid of it than of any other, for girls are proud of their hair, and we would have stood anything sooner than have it cut off.⁶³

The overlooker's punishment of Ellen also seems to be a punishment directed toward Ellen as a girl. Thus it reveals her peers' attitude toward females in the mines, an attitude that predated the cultural uproar after the middle class 'discoveries' of 1842.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ibid., 184, 111.

⁶¹ibid., 122-4.

⁶²See The Ashton Chronicle, 23 June 1849, reprinted in Edmund and Ruth Frow (eds), The Dark Satanic Mills (Salford, 1980).

⁶³ibid., 24-5.

⁶⁴Mines, op. cit., 1842 XV-XVII.

The reaction of Ellen's peers to her punishment can be understood as an alternative psychological development for dealing with the tensions between a girl worker and her mother. The depth of these tensions was illustrated in the relationship between Ellen and her mother. By asserting their superiority to working girls in the mines, girls in the factories were asserting themselves as more than just wage earners for their mothers. In contrast to Ellen's rebellion against the factory regime, the 'good' girls responded to the psychological tensions of wage earning for their mother by elaborating upon their social position, which made them more than just wage earners.

While there is little additional information about Ellen's immediate peers, working girls' desires for clothes were well recognized at the time.⁶⁵ When in 1795 an evangelical writer and social reformer rewrote the story of the Lancashire collier girl, she included a passage warning working girls against wasting their earnings on 'vanity of dress'.⁶⁶ As early as 1833 there are indications that women in the factories were using make-up, and even females working in the coal mines often wore necklaces and earrings.⁶⁷ One scholar has noted that a key component in the expansion of demand during the Industrial Revolution was working women's demands for fashionable clothing.⁶⁸ This scholar attributes women's demands for clothes to 'social emulation' -- 'the mill girl who wanted to dress like a duchess, and who, according to a host of contemporary observers, could manage an increasingly close approximation of

⁶⁵On the other hand, historians have not tended to take this desire seriously. A prominent exception is the heart-rending account given by Steedman in Landscape, especially 24, 28-32, 121.

⁶⁶The reformer was Hannah More. See Hair, op. cit., 78. Nineteenth century literary treatments of factory girls also often presented 'the temptation of fine clothes'. See Wanda F. Neff, Victorian Working Women (London, 1929), 52.

⁶⁷On make-up, see First Report, op. cit., 1833, XX, D.3.14; on necklaces and earrings, see Mines, op. cit., 1842 XVII, 161, and John, op. cit., 182.

⁶⁸Neil McKendrick, 'Home Demand and economic growth: a new view of the role of women and children in the industrial revolution', in Neil McKendrick, (ed.), Historical Perspective on English Thought and Society in honor of J. H. Plumb (London, 1974).

doing so'.⁶⁹ The argument here is that the mill girls' desire to dress like a duchess may have had more to do with a displaced rebellion against an wage-earning relationship to their mother than to the influence of the duchess. The argument is not about the mother-daughter relationship in some general, abstract psychoanalytic space, but rather about how gross economic deprivation of a particular historical period was situated and worked out in a central personal relationship.⁷⁰

The repression and displacement of 'good' girls' reactions against the terms of their existence as worker-children may also help to explain working-class women's susceptibility to non-wage earning roles as mothers. Such a role might would have resonated with a women's repressed resentment toward childhood wage earning experience, and would have offered an alternative elaboration of identity associated with a nurturing ideal of motherhood. The story of Mary and Ellen also suggests that a mother's burden of enforcing the rules of work on her daughter/wage earner was a source of considerable emotional strain in their relationship. A male figure presented as an external source of law offered a psychological outlet for this strain. Thus the experience of child labor may have also contributed to females' reluctance to claim authority within the family.

While recent literature has tended to downplay the importance of child labour in early nineteenth century England,⁷¹ the evidence does support the potential significance of female child labour in affecting working class women's

⁶⁹*ibid.*, 198, 209. For a recent contribution, explicitly including women and children, to the long-standing debate about trends in the standard of living in nineteenth-century England, see Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, 'Old questions, new data and alternative perspectives: family living standards in the industrial revolution', *Journal of Economic History*, lxx (Dec. 1992), 849-880.

⁷⁰See Steedman, *op. cit.*, 121. Gagnier, *op. cit.*, 58, has also noted that subjectivity has '...profound vulnerability to the deprivations of the body'.

⁷¹Hugh Cunningham, 'The employment and unemployment of children in England c. 1680-1851', *Past & Present*, cxxvi (Feb. 1990), 149.

reception of gender roles. The Industrial Revolution brought factory wage labour, a form of labour that involved a radical shift in personal relationships, to a significant proportion of young girls in Lancashire in the early nineteenth century. The factory returns of 1835 indicate that 37% of twelve year old girls in Lancashire were working in cotton, woollen, flax, and silk factories that used power and that were large enough for the factory inspectors' attention.⁷² However, the Factory Act of 1833 forbade the employment of children under nine and restricted the hours of children aged nine to twelve; this created an incentive to decrease the number of young children employed and to exaggerate the ages of those who were employed.⁷³ Redistributing the child workers twelve years old and under in the 1835 returns in accordance with evidence on the age distribution of child workers in 1833 implies that 24% of twelve year old girls in Lancashire and 12% of ten year old girls worked in the factories that the inspectors surveyed.⁷⁴ There is some evidence that about two decades earlier the share of girls ten and under was even higher.⁷⁵ Moreover, the share

⁷²This figure offers a very different perspective from *ibid.*, 141, which shows that only 1.4% of girls aged five to nine years were employed in Lancashire in 1851. The age of girls under consideration is a key issue, especially given the Factory Act of 1833. See below. The number of girls employed, 6158, is calculated from BPP, Factory Inspectors' Reports, 1835, XLV, 84. To estimate the number of twelve year old girls in Lancashire in 1835, I adjusted the proportion of girls aged 10-14 in the female population in Lancashire in 1851 using Wrigley and Schofield's estimates of the change between 1831 and 1851 in share of the population aged 5-14, and applied this proportion to a population estimate for Lancashire in 1835 interpolated from the Census figures for 1831 and 1841. Assuming that the share of twelve year old girls among girls 10-14 was the same in 1835 as in 1851, I then used Census data for the latter figure to arrive at the final estimate. See BPP, Census of 1851, 1852, LXXXVIII, Part I, Table 6 clix, Table II cxciv, 1852-3 LXXXVI, 133, and E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, The Population History of England 1541-1871 (London, 1981) Table A3.1, 529.

⁷³The restrictions were phased in over time. When the above survey took place the employment of 12 year olds was not restricted. For details of the legislation and enforcement efforts, see Thomas, op. cit., 61-71, 115-45.

⁷⁴The distribution is from a survey of 3814 females in Lancashire cotton mills. Factories Inquiry, op. cit., 1834, XIX, 21.

⁷⁵The age and experience of females in factory rosters from 1818 and 1819 indicate that 50% of the females started work at 10 years of age or younger. See Douglas Galbi, 'The Perpetuation of Gender in the Early English Cotton Mills', Working Paper (Centre for History and Economics, King's College, Cambridge) Table 5.

of young girls working in factories was higher in factory centres; in 1835 in Manchester and environs 58% of twelve year old girls were working in factories.⁷⁶ Thus the experience of being a child wage earner in a factory was a significant aspect of the experience of females in Lancashire.

The social and geographic position of factory girls re-enforces the importance of their psychology for understanding the development of gender roles. Nineteenth century Lancashire was recognized as a locus of an emerging new order, an order that put England at the center of world history. Working class women in Lancashire in the 1830s and 1840s -- the women among whom the experience of child labor in the factory was concentrated -- gained cultural prominence from Lancashire's position as a symbol of a new economic order. Moreover, factory girls had a basis for association with a large number of women, an independent source of earnings, and a cultural arena in which institutions were in a state of flux. Among women they were in a relatively good position to provide leadership in defining women's roles.

This paper suggests that women's psychological response to the relational terms of childhood wage earning reduced the potential of a rebellion against domesticity.⁷⁷ It does not attempt to explore the psychological development of male children. Nonetheless, it is worth briefly considering the issue as a foil for the argument above. A boy who went to work in the factories in 1832 at age seven presented his relationship with his mother in his autobiography as follows:

⁷⁶Calculated as above for Lancashire, using *Census, op. cit.*, 1852, LXXXVII-Part I, Table V, excix, and 1852-3, LXXXVI, 135. The population figure for Manchester and environs encompasses Manchester, Salford, and Chorlton. The later two were important factory areas that apparently were included under Manchester in the factory survey.

⁷⁷It is worth noting that Owenism, which presented the most significant alternative vision to the ideology of domesticity, proposed a radical restructuring of the relationship between parents and children, and a very different form of child labor. See, for example, Gregory Claeys, *Citizens and Saints* (Cambridge, 1989), 81.

She too felt so happy when I came home on the Saturday nights, and laid my small wages in her lap, that the tear would sometimes start to her eye. Perhaps it was a tear of gratitude, or sorrow, excited by wanting the protection of a husband and gaining the premature assistance of a son.⁷⁸

This account reads like a projection of the author's relationship with his wife, or his idealization of it, back into his childhood. The literature has well-documented men's interest in seeking to establish the ideology of domesticity.⁷⁹ Men's interests as adults in relationship to their wives provided men with a powerful way to rationalize their experiences as child labourers, and hence contain the psychological strain of that experience. For a woman who as a child had been a wage earner for her mother, her possibilities as an adult wage earner did not provide such a construct for resolving the psychological impact of that experience.

* * *

The social, economic, and political circumstances of early nineteenth century England led to young girls working in factories under brutal conditions. This paper has explored the psychological and relational dimensions of such experience through an account of Ellen Hootton, a young girl-worker, her mother Mary, and Ellen's nameless co-workers. Ellen was the object of an incident of physical abuse that attracted public attention, and that attention led to an official examination and a few obscure pages of testimony in the parliamentary record. Drawing upon this text and more recognized history, I have tried to put together a different set of stories -- the story of Mary and Ellen's psychological and relational deformation under the circumstances of their lives, the story of the other 'good' girls, and an account of how these

⁷⁸Vincent, *op. cit.*, 83.

⁷⁹See introduction to this paper.

stories fit into the larger story of the nineteenth century.⁸⁰ The resulting history offers important insights into the effects of deprivation and the development of gender.

From a guild-controlled metal manufacturing centre in the early eighteenth century to a coal-and-cotton proletarian town at the end of the nineteenth, the history of Wigan presents a fundamental story of the Industrial Revolution. Next to that history, the history in this paper is more recalcitrant, and the problem of interpretation is obvious in the construction of the history as well as in the evidence itself. The examiner himself noted that Mary, Ellen, and the overlooker '...spoke such broad dialect, that I was often compelled to make them repeat their answers once or twice before I could seize their meaning. Neither did they always understand me at first, and several of their contradictions are to be attributed to this'. One of his conclusions was, 'I hardly know what to say of the mother', and as if to underscore his lack of understanding he went on to refer to her as 'Mrs. Hootton'. This paper has reached not only for a more satisfying interpretation but also for the historical dimension.

While the history in this paper is not propelled by well-recognized currents of the story of industrialization, the general issues addressed here have an important precedent. Over thirty years ago the psychological strains associated with child labour were a central aspect of a major book that used the Industrial Revolution to illustrate structural-functional analysis.⁸¹ That book set out an elaborate theoretical apparatus and made specific and detailed causal claims. While the book pulled together a wide-ranging and subsequently

⁸⁰The approach in this paper draws considerable inspiration from Steedman's Landscape, *op. cit.*

⁸¹Neil Smelser, Social Change in the Industrial Revolution (London, 1959). Smelser focuses on the role of fathers and had very little to say about mothers.

influential body of empirical evidence, neither its theoretical structure nor its specific claims have fared well with the passage of time.⁸² More significantly, the book has not stimulated any debate about the psychological aspects of child labour. This issue may have been forgotten at least in part because the theoretical structure of the book seems to have precluded the sensitivity and empathy necessary to transform historical objects into subjects.⁸³

This paper has attempted to produce an affective account of some psychological aspects of child labour and gender. It focused primarily on a narrow historical site in order to secure a richly textured framework for an unavoidably speculative endeavour. While the account in this paper is speculative, it can be tested. The challenge of refuting this history is to produce a more compelling story of the characters I have presented, or to find in other historical sources characters who cry more deeply.⁸⁴

⁸²For an influential early critique, see Michael Anderson, 'Sociological History and the Working-Class Family: Smelser Revisited', *Social History* iii (Oct. 1976), 317-334.

⁸³The development of writing about women and gender has in some cases led to approaches quite similar to Smelser's, although professing a very different theoretical orientation. For a critical account of the historiography of women and gender see Carolyn Steedman, 'Bimbos from hell', *Social History* 19:1 (Jan. 1994), 57-67.

⁸⁴This paper is in part a response to recent debates about historiographic methodology, social history, popular history, and post-modernism. See the debate about social history and its discontents: *Social History*, xvii, 2 (May 1992), 167-88; *ibid.*, xviii, 1 (Jan. 1993), 1-16, 81-5; *ibid.*, xviii (May '93), 219-33; *ibid.*, xix, 1 (Jan. 1994), 81-97; the debate on history and post-modernism: *Past & Present*, cxxxi (May 1991), 217-8; *ibid.*, cxxxiii (Nov. 1991), 204-13; *ibid.*, cxxxv (May 1992), 189-208; and the debate on the dilemma of popular history: *Past & Present*, cxxxii (Aug. 1991), 130-49; *ibid.*, cxli (Nov. 1993), 207-14, 215-19. These debates, it seems to me, become less interesting as they drift farther from the historical problems and texts at hand.