all kinds between Houston and a Scottish village, and in *Cal*, which looks at the separation of Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. The title of *Another Time, Another Place* is clear enough, and the film brings together two cultures as well, Scottish and Italian. *Company of Wolves* takes us out of time and space and into fairy tale (or more precisely into Bruno Bettelheim).

What are we to make of this? Does it suggest panic, diffidence, isolation? I think not. I think it suggests we are learning to look, rather than learning to dream; that we want to place ourselves, because that is a beginning of understanding, and quite different from the conservative invitation to know our places. And paradoxically, but plausibly, we place ourselves by stepping out of our familiar spots, or by juxtaposing them with others. There is a real curiosity about the world here, which is quite different from nostalgia or escapism, or the desire to put Britain on the map with a big splash.

We can focus the question perhaps by asking in what sense *The Killing Fields*, say, is an English film, apart from the simple fact of its provenance. It is about Cambodia, the American involvement, the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge, the possibility of human survival in impossible conditions. It is a simplified, sentimental film in many ways, and not of the same order imaginatively as *Apocalypse Now* or even the lumbering *Deer Hunter*. But it does something the American films cannot do. It looks steadily at suffering and loss. It counts the human cost, and it refuses allegory.

I don't mean it merely reports, I mean its interest is that of a bewildered watcher. Bewilderment is not specifically English—do we perhaps even think of it as un-English?—but the modesty which confesses it can be; and the attempt at balance in the midst of bewilderment. What all these films suggest to me is that we don't need to stick to empire or whimsy or glossy adaptations of famous novels, but that we can, in our films, be interested in *anything*, if our interest is real and worked at.

Our Englishness will then be in our perceptions and our responses, and not in our topics or our manners, and our modesty will have all sorts of ambitions of its own.

TELEVISION

DOWN AMONG THE NATIVES

SIMON HOGGART

The new soap opera, *East Enders*, BBC1's desperate attempt to win the Tuesday and Thursday night viewers, has two script writers. This accounts for a lot. One of them has a real ear for dialogue, and has caught the constantly aggressive tone of ordinary London discourse, in which the most neutral statement is accompanied by a challenge to the listener to disagree. Thus: "I come in for my tea, dinn I?", "You wiv 'im, incha?" The more humorous or kindly the remark, the more truculent the tone.

Not surprisingly, outsiders find this puzzling, and are often thought stand-offish. "Whossmarrer wiv you then, son?" is the correct Cockney response to this.

The other scriptwriter has caught the authentic tang of the BBC studios. This is how the genteel Radio Four-listening classes would speak if they had London accents. Pleasant white woman to equally pleasant Asian shopkeeper: "Good for you, love. It's nice to know there's a bit of community feeling left." Pub manager to girl on the phone, after a bar room brawl: "It's just part of the everyday life of a humble publican!" This scriptwriter is most at home with the only middle class figure in the show, the local GP (who, with fights, unexpected pregnancies and murders, is kept pretty busy).

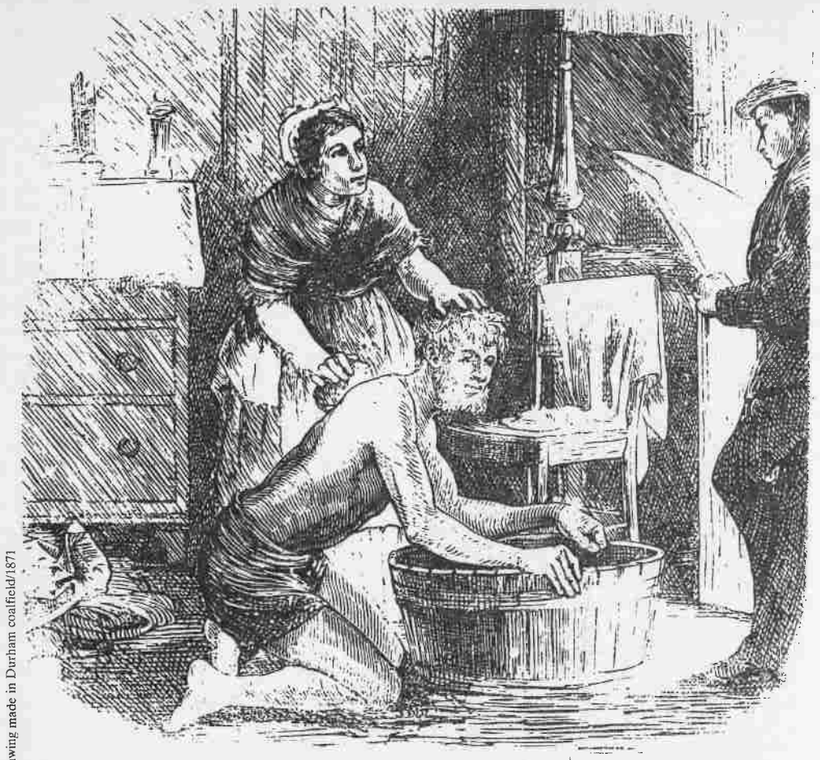
"When I have some information on Reg, I will make sure it's dispersed to the rest of the community . . . now you have some joyful information of your own to impart." Whoever talked like that, and when?

I don't know which writer provides the rhyming slang, though I have noticed that this archaic form of speech is much more common on TV than in real life. Last week "Vera Lynn" was used for gin, and someone said about a chap with a bad heart: "touch of the old dodgy strawberry," an improbable phrase presumably derived from tart = heart. Actually the genuine rhyming slang that does survive is strangely dated: "ruby" is a curry (from Ruby Murray) and "tom" is jewellery (from tom-foolery).

British and American soaps are often compared, and yet there is a complete difference between them. In the US they stress the glamorous and the unattainable. Here we prefer the unpleasant and the humdrum. The set of *East Enders* is superb: the flyblown streets, the litter, the tawdry shops, the miles of corrugated iron make an entirely convincing picture of London as it really is. The pub is no cosy nook; it's a horrible great barn, and in the living quarters you can smell the stale beer and disinfectant.

I have never seen anyone remotely interesting or sympathetic in *Crossroads*, currently the country's second most popular soap, yet that doesn't harm it at all. Likewise *East Enders* has already produced a batch of loathsome characters: a vicious old man, a horrible cafe proprietor's wife, various disgusting and violent teenagers, and a mother-in-law who appears to lack any redeeming features at all.

The characters we're supposed to like are, for the most part, simply dull. At the end of the first two episodes I found I had no interest in what the future held for any of them. This places *East Enders* firmly in the tradition of British soap operas, and I have little doubt that it will in time be a huge success.



Drawing made in Durham coalfield/1871

THE COLLIER'S LETTER

RAYMOND WILLIAMS

The Literature of Labour: 200 years of working class writing
H. Gustav Klaus
Harvester Press £18.95
0 7108 06310

For me, I cannot boast the rules
Which learned masters teach in schools;
The useful rules of grammar clear
Alas! they never reach'd my ear,
Yielding instruction how to write
Correctly, elegant, polite.

The lines were written by "John Lucas, Cobler," and published in Salisbury in 1776. They can be usefully compared with these:

"I was at yor hoose las neet, and myed mysel very comfortable. Ye hey nee family, and yor just won man on the colliery, I see ye hev a greet lot of rooms, and big cellars, and plenty wine and beer in them, which I got ma share on. Noo I naw some at wor colliery that has three or fower lads and lasses, and they live in won room not half as gude as yor cellar. I don't pretend to naw very much, but I naw there shudnt be that much difference."

This is an extract from a letter written in a Durham mining village in 1831. It goes on to say: "to get noledge is to naw wer ignerent."

All the central questions about that important but difficult category, "working class writing," can be defined through this comparison. There is the intense consciousness of a lack of education, which cannot be either patronised or romanticised. At the same time, by definition, the writers through whom we become aware of this have to some extent broken the barriers erected against them. In a society still in majority illiterate, they have put pen to paper, and in one way or another got into print. That is cause in itself for respect, and at times for celebration, but it is what really happens in this process that should command our attention.

Thus would anyone now prefer Lucas's couplets to the colloquial flow of the anonymous collier's letter? Or is that a way in which the useful question can be put? Straining, with considerable if imperfect success, for the kind of writing by the rules which was one version of 18th century ruling class literature, Lucas is in another world from the collier, and his composition is *The Author to his Muse* rather than an anonymous letter after a break-in. If the controlling category is "literature," there is a clear dividing line between them.

Yet if we look back from the experience of later literary practice, Lucas's lines are an exercise, over and above their imputed intention, while the letter has the directness and vitality which 20th century novelists brought to an art form. In our own time it would be a skilled writer who could consciously match the placing of that clause "which I got ma share on," so effective at the end of the running sentence. The "rules of [written] grammar" would dislocate it. Yet in speech, under pressure, similar achievements are common; there have been several examples during the current coal strike.

The key concept in all cultural analysis is that of *selective tradition*. But it works at several levels. At the first and still most important, it is what has happened in literary studies to a whole body of writing which has been left outside the canon. The great merit of Gustav Klaus's new book is that it puts so much of this work back into general knowledge, though it remains ironic that, as he points out, a large proportion of it, written to be popular literature, is accessible only in a few specialised libraries.

The orthodox defence of the selective tradition is that it works by merit: many thousands of authors not from the working class are also inaccessible and forgotten. But this defence is doubtful on two grounds: first, because there is little evidence that most of these works have even been read, within mainline literary scholarship, as a way of rejecting the "marginal" and "ephemeral"; second, because there is accumulating evidence that a cultural lock has been put on this whole body of writing, from social and cultural presuppositions which many scholars would be reluctant to admit but which, if relatively unconscious, are all the worse for that. Klaus may slightly overstate the point, but it is in general true, as he argues, that it was mainly foreign scholars who began recovering the full extent of English working class writing.

Among these scholars, Klaus, in my judgment, is pre-eminent. His book is a fine example of sustained, extending and always thoughtful research. His first four chapters are informative accounts of older writing: plebeian poets in 18th century England (with a useful analysis of distribution by trade and region); early socialist Utopias in England, 1792-1848; the historical bent of the chartist novel; forms of miners' literature in the 19th century. As scholarly operations against the simplest kind of selective tradition, these are admirable and fascinating.

There are then three chapters which raise questions at the next and more difficult level. Two are general: socialist novels of 1936; and the "documentarism," over several media,