**BILLY ELLIOT**

This film came out in 2000 and was directed by Stephen Daldry [Oscar nominee]. Some background: In 1984, Britain was in the middle of a conflict between the coal miners and the government of Conservative Party Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The government owned the coalmines and planned to close some and reduce production at others to save money and break the power of the miners’ union, which was historically very strong. This would lead to fewer mining jobs.

The film is set in 1984 in a small town in the coal-mining region of County Durham, near the North sea, about 250 miles from London. The accent of the region is very distinctive and very difficult to imitate [unlike some other British accents]. Before the strike, British miners had been fairly well paid [by UK standards] and had a very strong sense of social class/worker solidarity, and strong ties to their communities. Their identities as workingmen had been built over many generations with people doing the same work and living in the same towns. There are, of course, other coal mining areas of Britain with similar characteristics.

The film suggests a strong sense of pride among the miners but also a certain degree of insularity: Very little travel or knowledge of—or association with—different kinds of people. So, for instance, leaving home and seeking a different path from that of one’s family would be a very big deal even though one can go by train from the city of Durham to London in only a few hours. It has been a fairly common theme in US society—historically more open to mobility than British society—that one can move ahead economically [or intellectually] and move away from home in the process. But, in doing so, one will probably have to give something up. There will be tradeoffs. Is this a theme in this film?

Other things to consider when the watching the film include: expectations for men and women; whether one’s work defines a person; what one owes to oneself, to one’s family, and to one’s fellow workers [and/or social class]; expectations parents have for their children; individual vs. group effort; masculinity and homophobia.

What does the film have to say about [and what are its strengths and weaknesses in addressing] these and other social issues?

[Eventually, government policies prevailed and the mining workforce was reduced. The Durham area has recovered somewhat from the economic downturn of the 1980s. The city of Durham—with the wonderful cathedral mentioned in the film—is now one big university campus, with the university founded in the early 19th century (only the third one in England after Oxford and Cambridge) taking over a large number of old buildings and the region attempting to develop service-related enterprises.]