Clark, Ben and Hubble, Nick, eds. (2018) *Working-Class Writing: Theory and Practice*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, NY.

Review by Courtney Pina Miller

Working-Class Writing: Theory and Practice, edited by Ben Clarke and Nick Hubble, is an ambitious and timely project that carefully considers the state of canonical and non-canonical working-class writing in the age of Trump and Brexit. The collection's title begs the question that nearly every study of working-class writing feels obligated to answer: 'How does one define 'working-class literature'?' It is a question that has troubled scholars of working-class literature since the emergence of the field in the 1970s (see, for example, writings by Paul Lauter, Janet Zandy, Renny Christopher, Carolyn Whitson, William DeGenaro, and Sherry Linkon). These scholars, among others, have identified qualities that make texts working class, and have continued to probe whether working-class literature is best understood as that written *by*, *about*, and/or *for* the working class. If you grab this collection looking for a definitive answer to this enduring question, you may be disappointed. However, others (myself included) see this as the volume's strength—it showcases working-class writing, in theory and in practice, as a dynamic field of study which spans across time, geography, and genre. In fact, the collection seemingly suggests that settling on a clean and tidy definition of working-class writing would cause more harm than good.

Clarke and Hubble are explicit about the intentions of this volume—the purpose is *not* to offer a comprehensive analysis or definitive examination of 'working-class writing viewed from the perspective of 2018' (13). Indeed, this volume looks forward just as much as it looks back. Instead, the collection suggests that 'working-class writing and representation over the decades ahead requires new approaches,' spotlights class-focused analysis as having 'a central role within academic literary study' (13), and persuasively demonstrates the social, cultural, and political reasons why working-class writing is consequential in these uncertain times.

As its subtitle suggests, this volume examines both the theoretical and practical aspects of working-class studies because it 'must continually explore and define the field it analyses' (6). Various thematic and theoretical threads are woven throughout the collection, which begins with two chapters that are particularly self-conscious about the role working-class theory has in literary studies, as well as its complex relationship to the role and identity of working-class academics. Clarke's chapter challenges the long enduring belief that working-class writing is dependent upon conventional realist aesthetic practices. By examining interwar texts like James Hanley's *Men in Darkness*, James Barke's *Major Operation,* and Jack Hilton's *Caliban Shrieks,* Clarke argues for the recognition of neglected working-class writers not merely alongside canonical modernists like Joyce, but instead to contemplate how interwar writers rethink modernist aesthetic and political possibilities without being confined by their conventional realist forms and histories. Cassandra Falke's chapter is dually invested in thinking about working-class writing and scholarship by working-class academics. To focus on the opportunity working-class scholars have to offer to the field of literary studies, Falke blends personal reflection of her own working-class background

with commentary on contemporary U.S. and U.K. gaps in income and educational attainment. Among this collection's many outstanding chapters, Falke's direct engagement with the intellectual, pedagogical, and personal commitments of working-class academics makes it stand out.

Within the first section of the collection, an intriguing debate emerges between Luke Seaber and Natasha Periyan, whose chapters identify and contemplate how early twentieth-century writers participate in different versions of class passing. Seaber examines the phenomenon of 'social passing' in which upper- or middle-class writers, like T.S. Eliot and James Joyce, narratively pass as working- or lower-middle class. Seaber offers the provocative and persuasive suggestion that perhaps canonical modernists were more conservative than their predecessors, since they seemingly disallow working-class voices to speak for themselves. Periyan's chapter subtly challenges this contention by examining two versions of Virginia Woolf's published Introduction to *Life as We Have Known It,* a collection of testimonials by members of the Women's Co-operative Guild in early twentieth-century England. Periyan unpacks Woolf's candid reflection on the Guild's 1913 Congress, the women who spoke there, and the differences between their lives and hers. Periyan argues that Woolf's prefatory material validates these records of working-class experience and offers a distinction between democratic art and working-class writing. Periyan's chapter not only offers interesting contrasts to Seaber's preceding chapter, but also counters the enduring criticism of Woolf's elitism and snobbery.

Another intriguing inter-chapter dialogue that surfaces are two different examinations of mid-century working-class writing as it intersects with race and London. Matti Ron's study of 'Windrush Generation' writers ER Braithwaite, Sam Selvon, and George Lamming uses Bakhtin and Vološinov as theoretical frameworks to analyze the use of Black vernacular. This narrative strategy, Ron asserts, captures the intermingling of race, class, and migrant-status in texts that imagine the experience of the Black British working-class in mid-century Caribbean London. Like Ron, Jason Finch's chapter contemplates race, class, and London and complicates typical assumptions about 1930s and 1960s era East Enders through a focus on Jewish writers who were, in fact, socially mobile. Through a meticulous biographical and literary study of Simon Blumenfeld and Alexander Baron, Finch theorizes the notion of boundary-crossing as cultural, classed, geographic, and artistic. Finch convincingly asserts that to best understand Jewish East End writers of the time is to resist the temptation to merely class them as 'Jews' or as 'British working-class writers.' One needs to unpack the nuances between (and within) these reductive categories, and to do so, Finch suggests, usefully destabilizes the categories themselves.

Considerations of race and geography are nuanced by chapters that perform postcolonial readings of working-class theory and fiction. Jack Windle develops a theoretical framework for examining working-class writing that foregrounds its marginal status in literary studies. Windle examines the 'arrival' of theory in Britain alongside the interwoven histories of the British working-class and (post)colonial peoples to develop a bold and interdisciplinary approach to primary texts that builds upon postcolonial, feminist, and social theories that have refined literary studies since the mid-twentieth century. Sabujkoli Bandopadhyay's chapter argues that continuity exists between the colonial working-class of the subcontinent and the British working classes during the late colonial period. Bandopadhyay offers a compelling postcolonial analysis of Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Coolie* with an argument situated between E.P. Thompson's well-known assertion about the

'making' of the English working-class and Dipesh Chakrabarty's critique of Thompson's exclusion of colonial workers. Bandopadhyay's chapter offers unique insights into how and why expanding the understanding of the working-class subject depends upon key historical and geographic revisions.

While many chapters complicate the relationship between working-class literature and canonization, Simon Lee and Pamela Fox are particularly invested in analyzing working-class form and genre. Lee examines British kitchen sink realism to consider how this movement challenges and expands the norms and conventions of British working-class fiction. Drawing from a familiar body of spatial theorists (e.g., Lefebvre, Foucault, Harvey, and Soja), Lee considers both theatrical forms like John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*, as well as the novel, like Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. Paying careful attention to classed spaces, Lee ultimately suggests that kitchen sink realism offers a unique class consciousness that unifies working-class people during a moment of vast and alienating change. Also a meditation on form, Fox discusses former mill worker Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, an important, but oft neglected, working-class writer and journalist whose work offered a feminist recasting of the Gothic conventions of the Brontës. It is Holdsworth's use of melodrama that distinguishes her as a working-class writer because, as Fox demonstrates, this genre has complicated class roots as it was originally affiliated with 'low' (i.e., working-class) venues and performance styles. Fox demonstrates how a melodramatic framework can productively reimagine socialist-feminist aims, thereby making the case for Holdsworth's value in working-class and literary studies alike.

Towards the end of the collection, the focus turns to contemporary literary practices. Phil O'Brien draws from Raymond Williams' well-known concept of *structure of feeling* to illustrate the classed and gendered consequences of deindustrialization. Through careful readings of place and space in Anthony Cartwright's *The Afterglow,* Catherine O'Flynn's *What Was Lost,* and Edward Hogan's *Blackmoor*, O'Brien examines their critiques of capitalism and preoccupation with deindustrialized landscapes, which challenge the 'cultural mythology' of traditional understandings of labor, thereby undermining contemporary notions of gendered working-class identity. Peter Clandfield considers landscapes of a different kind through an analysis of the mythical and representational elements that echo a post-WWII social democratic investment in nationalized railways (i.e., mobility) and public housing (i.e., shelter). Clandfield illustrates how Alan Warner's *The Deadman's Pedal* reminisces on public infrastructure that was created by, and for, the British working-class and how this narrative investment offers contemporary readers, especially critics of neoliberal Britain, a new way to think about the heritage of the welfare state.

In lieu of a conclusion, the collection ends with Hubble's chapter that uses fellow contributor Pamela Fox's discussion of working-class shame (see *Class Fictions,* 1994) as a lens through which to read Pat Barker's *Union Street*, Gordon Burns' *The North of England Home Service*, and Zadie Smith's *NW*. Hubble focuses on the novels' intriguing meditations on gendered responses to working-class shame and nostalgia, arguing that the conventional trope of classed escapism (i.e., 'getting out') might best be thought of instead as 'going beyond.' This does not merely require economic mobility, but instead relies upon the painful processes of self-recognition of class identity. Hubble exemplifies the collection's broader goal of arguing for new intersectional reading practices which focus on the multi-facetedness of working-class identity.

Working-Class Writing: Theory and Practice functions as a useful nexus for what working-class studies as a field currently looks like, and it belongs on working-class studies and literary studies syllabi alike. Assigned as a collection or read on a chapter-by-chapter basis, this text is a timely companion to John Lennon and Magnus Nilsson's *Working-Class Literature(s): Historical and International Perspectives* (2017) and three recently-published histories of American, British, and Irish working-class literature, each published by Cambridge University Press. This volume contributes to what I hope is a long-lasting scholarly and public investment in historicizing, anthologizing, and theorizing working-class fictional, non-fictional, and poetic writing. Most significantly, its commitment to intersectional class-focused readings offers a vital challenge to the persistent (and problematic) homogenization of working-class identity. Intersectionality, *not* homogeneity, is the best avenue for building and maintaining working-class solidarity and consciousness. For current students and scholars of working-class and literary studies, this collection intervenes and updates the critical conversation about what working-class writing is, who it's for and about, what it looks like, and most importantly, why it matters.

Reviewer Bio

Courtney Pina Miller is a Ph.D. Candidate in English at Brandeis University, where she teaches literature and writing. Her research interests include transatlantic modernism, working-class studies, representations of domestic labor, and race, gender, and sexuality studies. She is also a recipient of the WCSA's 2019 Young Scholars and Activists Fellowship.