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Volume 5 Issue 3: Editorial, Special Working-Class Poetry Issue

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This issue of the Journal is quite different to previous issues because it is devoted to working-class poetry. We are very excited to share a selection of poems with you and to hopefully draw your attention to the importance of working-class poetry and the possibilities that can exist in terms of form, style and content.

Over time and place, poetry has helped us communicate ideas and emotions that are difficult to express with straight speech. Rather than evaluate poems as text on a page in relation to others exclusively, the works here ask us to consider context, value, and purpose. What might poetry do for us as an emergent, transnational, diverse, working-class community? How can it help us communicate a working-class ethos, intervene in hegemonic depictions, and imagine new ways of being? Through their focus on poetry, the critics and poets included here illuminate working-class worlds.

Poetry is an excellent medium for expressing working-class life and working-class people from around the world have used poetry to show what it is like to be working class – to convey the feelings and the emotions connected to this experience. It allows for the creative expression of working-class epistemologies and points of view on power. Working-class poets convey them as individuals and members of intergenerational and horizontal collectives.

Working-class poetry tells stories, creates impression, evokes experience and deals with many topics. There are poems about working-class work, whether it be the huge range of manual labour, or white-collar and service work. There are poems about being out of work too and surviving on social security or of relying on the informal economy to make ends meet. Working-class poetry can tell stories of hardship and poverty. The poems can celebrate working-class culture, family and community. They can be nostalgic, but rarely romantic. Poems about working-class life can be tragic or inspiring and uplifting and they can be serious or very funny (sometimes at the same time!). Take note on themes and points of view in working-class poetry. It could be that working-class communities have different ways of dealing with death than middle class peers; sometimes, it might involve jokes. Euphemisms that mask or conceal truths might be less frequently used. Ordinary, poetic subjects like love and beauty and ideals might be articulated differently as working-class poets work hard to make their art say what they mean. Ultimately working-class poems are written *about*, *for* and usually *by* working-class people.

Working-class poetry plays with language and often utilises a working-class vernacular. There might be slang or code-switching between languages and there will be the rhythm of everyday speech. To enhance our communication, we might need to develop an updateable glossary of key-terms as many use vernacular expressions to say what they mean, beautifully. And the everyday often dominates working-class poetry. Poems about work, about home, about family

reveal much about how class works. These poems don't rely on abstract ideas – they ground them in palpable experience and reveal the concrete, the specific and the small details that speak volumes about what it is like to really be working class.

We can learn much from reading working-class poetry. Xu Lizhi (1990-2014) revealed the conditions for factory workers in a Foxconn factory in China. His poems tell a tragic story of a worker unable to cope with the exploitation. His poems resonate with workers around the world and cast light on the situation for exploited factory workers making products for western markets. Taneum Bambrick writes about working as a garbage collector at reservoirs on the Columbia River in the western US, as one of the few women in the workplace, with poems that reveal the intersections of class and gender. Wanda Coleman's (1946-2013) poems tell stories of life on the poverty line (and you can read an essay about the work of Coleman as well as Jan Beatty and Sandra Cisneros here). The poems of Mykaela Saunders explore class and race and the experiences of being a working class Indigenous Australian. Omar Sakr paints vivid pictures of life in the working-class suburbs of western Sydney and offers poems about being working class, queer and Arab. We encourage you to seek out the work of these poets, and many, many more (we've included a list at the end of this editorial to get you started!).

But you can of course, start with the poets in this issue. The issue begins with an essay by William Fogarty, 'You know all them things': Nostalgia, Idealization, and Speech in Working-Class Poems by Seamus Heaney, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Lucille Clifton'. Fogarty examines nostalgia in the poems of Heaney, Brooks and Clifton and suggests that the poets' use of language creates unsentimental poems about working-class life. They work across class contradictions between formally educated speech and working-class speech and make a home in and through the poem.

These poets, all dead, but far from gone, continue to provoke and ghost new work. Who can forget Heaney's, *the squat pen rests; snug as a gun*? We dig with it. This phrase resonates if your hands and your community's hands have held work tools with working-class weight to them. Janet Zandy's research gave us the conceptual tools to talk about this in *Hands: Physical Labor, Class, and Cultural Work* (2004). And Gwendolyn Brooks documentary approach to poetic practice, and her knowing to listen to lives not heard, is gloriously told in this 6-minute, new media project, 'We Real Cool', (2017). In another 6-minute video Lucille Clifton, in conversation with Quincy Troupe describes her antecedents coming into poetry which include elements not bound in books. Working-class poetry calls on us to listen. Heaney didn't say a pile of lead he said a gun. Like Wyclef Jean, *when I'm writing with a pen it turns into a lethal weapon*. Poetry is a place for the expression of righteous rage to provoke change.

Angela Costi's poetic essay 'Unfolding Layers of Labour: A Cross-Generational Account of Kinaesthetic Skills', explores the connections between migrant working-class women across generations through the shared experience of their labour. Costi weaves family history, poems and artistic collaboration throughout her poetic narrative. Hands center in her poems, too, through the work of sewing in factories on industrial machines, working needles, and seeing her mother's hands in her hands as she types the keyboard. Poetry helps us convey the intergenerational embodied experience of class.

A series of poems follows the essays. Lita Kurth writes of being young and getting ready for a night on the town in 'The Goddesses of Democracy Go Out Drinking and Dancing' and also writes of her grandmother in 'Josephine Habeck Kurth' – one of the many women who are so important to working-class families and communities.

Jason Yurcic's three poems, 'Albuquerque Summer's Day', '#3' and '#5' include stories of work, addiction, pain and joy. There is a sense of pride in the poems at the strength and resilience of working-class people.

In 'upward class (im)mobility' and 'first gen hurt', Sarah Traphagen takes the reader into the world of a working class, first-generation college educated student – a student who has faced class discrimination and the burden of student loans. As we read her work, we should consider how it resonates.

Ian C Smith follows with three prose poems; 'Bright Day', 'Underworld' and 'Rehabilitation', which evoke the experiences of being released from incarceration, and life in a small Australian town, as well as memories of brutality inside a youth detention facility. Smith's focus on incarceration and experiences Inside may be a theme evidenced in some working-class poetry. Yurcic's poems also reference this experience.

'They called her a methhead' is Jodie Childers' challenge to the judgemental attitudes toward working-class people low on the hierarchy whose work and lives and deaths are ignored if they are users. And in 'Mining for Copper' we follow two people who try to make a living by sorting through garbage, looking for anything of value. Here, she brings the older work of mountain mining the community knows to a new form they encounter in the city. The title calls on us to consider the bleak outcome of this rural urban migration and ask, how could working-class lives be better?

Jen Vernon's three poems (which include audio files of the poet reading the work) stem from working-class lives in the US west. 'Charleena Chavon Lyles' is a documentary poem dedicated to a woman by this name who has been elegized by the Black Lives Matter movement. 'Spotted Owl' talks back to rhetoric in a logging town that pits pro-environment and pro-worker as oppositional. 'Economics' applies Karl Marx's *species-being* concept to an observation of work and draws on the Irish word for labour, 'saothar.' Vernon learned this term from the *Irish Labour History Society* and their journal by the same name.

The last poem is L. Eva Wagner's 'Reflections from the Parking Lot' which is a 10-minute spoken word poetic memoir about her years spent working as a maintenance mechanic and crew leader on a college campus. Her piece is subtitled, 'Work is Property: A Sexual Harassment Theory.' In the piece, she philosophises the ways in which workspace becomes embodied space connected to one's personhood. As someone who deals with sexual harassment in a male-dominated field and takes pride in her work, how might the body become part of the job and a worker's challenge for jurisdiction over it and their workday and livelihood?

The poems are diverse in style and tone but share commonalities of working-class experience across different time zones and geographical locations. We hope the poems resonate with you and provoke you to write if you are a poet: furiously and vigorously, we need much more. And if you are an appreciator of working-class poetry in its many forms or a critic, we hope that you will seek out more and help us better appreciate it, too.

The issue also includes seven book reviews selected and edited by Christie Launius. Once again, the reviews demonstrate the growing number of books (both for academic and general audiences) that are focused on working-class life. The reviewers offer their insights into the

content of the books and bring a working-class perspective to their reviews. The range of topics is large, with reviews of books on subjects such as Dolly Parton; the stories of coal miners suffering from black lung disease in West Virginia; masculinity and class through the lens of gambling; the issue of downward class mobility and the loss of class privilege; the absence of class analysis in Queer Studies in the US; bankruptcy and its consequences in contemporary Detroit, and a history of a general strike in Seattle in 1919. The reviews are, as ever, thoughtful and offer serious appraisal and evaluation of the books in question.

With 2020 coming to a close, we look forward to a better 2021. We hope to see the Covid-19 pandemic under control, and with lessons learnt on how to look after populations during such an event in the future. Workers around the world will be hoping too that governments will start to act to improve job security and access to health care to prevent the kinds of devastating impact the virus has had on working-class communities. We are sure the momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement will continue, and inroads will be made into dismantling racist structures. And we hope that real action on climate change will be a feature too of 2021.

Whatever the year brings, we extend warm wishes to our readers, authors, reviewers, guest editors and all who have contributed to this Journal and to the work of the Working-Class Studies Association. We thank you for your commitment to documenting, advocating for, and representing the lives of working-class people – the working-class people who are our families, our friends and our communities. There is still much to be done, but we work together collectively and in solidarity.

Note

Jen Vernon would love to talk with working-class poets about their poems and creative work, please email her at jraevernon@gmail.com.

List of contemporary working-class poets

(This is just a small list of poets writing in, or translated into English – there are so many more from all around the world!). This list is in first-name alphabetical order. Some of the poets listed here have passed away. The majority of poets in this list are from the U.S.

Aaron Rudolph
Afaa Michael Weaver
Allison Adelle Hedge Coke
Amber Dawn
Amiri Baraka
Ana Castillo
Cherie Moraga
Diane Gilliam Fischer
Elizabeth Hodgson
Fred Voss
Gary Soto
Geoff Goodfellow
Herbert Scott

Jeanetta Calhoun Mish
Jeanne Bryner
Jim Daniels
Joe Weil
John McCullough
Joseph Millar
Joshua Michael Stewart
Leroy Moore
Lorna Dee Cervantes
Lucille Clifton
Mary Carroll-Hackett
Michelle M. Tokarczyk
Mykaela Saunders
Omar Sakr
Paula Meehan
Philip Levine
Pi.O.
Quraysh Ali Lansana
Rita Anne Higgins
Sandee Gertz Umbach
Sean Thomas Dougherty
Shannon Barber
Sue Doro
Susan Eisenberg
Taneum Bambrick
Tina Mozelle Braziel
Tom Lewin
Vievee Francis
Wanda Coleman
Xu Lizhi

‘You know all them things’: Nostalgia, Idealization, and Speech in Working-Class Poems by Seamus Heaney, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Lucille Clifton

William Fogarty, University of Central Florida

Abstract

This essay examines nostalgia, idealization, and speech in poems from the latter half of the twentieth century in the US and the UK that convey working-class experience, identifying nostalgia as a binding feature of such poems and tracing it to the 18th-century ‘nostalgia poem.’ I will first establish briefly how nostalgia in poems by Philip Levine, James Wright, and Robert Hayden results in idealizations that resist sentimentality and then demonstrate that the various forms of local speech employed in some other post-1945 poems about working-class life by Seamus Heaney, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Lucille Clifton act as a stay against such idealization, effectively transforming them into more explicitly anticlassist –and, in the case of Brooks and Clifton, antiracist and antisexist –forms of social critique and defiance. Their poems interrupt and complicate the idealization of the familiar working-class surroundings they seek to reenter, familiar and familial realms that are not just temporal and spatial but linguistic. They honor their characters’ fortitude in the face of working-class encumbrances not by idealizing them but by concentrating on their working-class characters’ linguistic origins. Manifestations of local speech in these nostalgic poems amount to a poetic resource that disrupts idealizations of working-class experience, critiquing, in that process, classism and, in Brooks and Clifton, revealing classism’s intersections with racism and sexism. These poems don’t just desire to go back to earlier worlds but *do* go back linguistically to working-class, nonstandard languages – their particular forms of original local speech–that refuse the conditions that would subordinate those languages and the people who speak them.

Keywords

Working-class literature, poetry and poetics, twentieth-century poetry, linguistics

It goes without saying that poems about working-class life would be concerned with labor and impoverishment. As Janet Zandy has observed, another definitive aspect of working-class experience is domesticity; she begins her anthology of twentieth-century working-class women’s writing by announcing, ‘Home is a good place to begin,’ explaining that in working-class cultures across that century in the US, ‘a pattern is evident of overlapping public and private spheres, of interrelated work life and homelife, and of conflicts between family life and individual aspirations’ (1990 pp. 1-4).[1] In twentieth-century working-class poetry in both the

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[1] Renny Christopher and Carolyn Whitson have observed that the communal nature of working-class life is an integral aspect of working-class literature: ‘Unlike the middle-class aesthetic, the working-class literary aesthetic does not focus on individuality. Because working-class people live in harsh conditions and know themselves to be individually powerless, working-class culture, as a result, does not celebrate individuality. It

US and the UK, home is a place to return to. Indeed, poems about twentieth-century working-class life often register a poignant longing to go back to family origins. In such poems, labor is typically presented as a hardship to counter poverty, and the enduring individuals usually portrayed are often contextualized as family members in domestic spaces, depicted as at once fatigued if not embattled and noble if not heroic. Think of the young brother in Philip Levine's 'You Can Have It,' his twenty-something-year-old hands already 'yellowed and cracked' as the poem imagines him and other men like him asking, breathlessly, 'Am I gonna make it?' (1994 pp. 196-97); or the simultaneously 'proud' and 'ashamed' men,' starved wives, and beautiful sons in James Wright's depiction of the mill town of 'Martins Ferry, Ohio' (1971 p. 113); or the father in Robert Hayden's 'Those Winter Sundays' working early in the 'splintering, breaking' cold to keep his family warm with a fire (1985 p. 41).[2] The father's efforts are thankless, and the poem registers in him a deep current of anger. And yet despite the shivering cold and the simmering rage, the poem travels back to that stern childhood home to extend finally a compunctious thanks to the enduring, dignified elder. Similarly, the men in Wright's Ohio are 'gray,' 'ruptured' workers but also wistful, told to be 'Dreaming of heroes,' while Levine's poem shuttles back thirty years to the bedroom of a pair of siblings exhausted from factory work, the older brother beseeching God to 'Give me back my young brother.' [3] These poems are marked by nostalgia, a persistent desire to return to the homeplace, despite the attendant impoverishments of those homes, and they are inclined to idealize their characters while they resist sentimentalizing them.

This essay examines such nostalgia for family life in poems from the latter half of the twentieth century on both sides of the Atlantic that contemplate working-class experience, identifying nostalgia as a binding feature of such poems and tracing it to what Aaron Santesso calls the eighteenth-century English 'nostalgia poem' (2006 p. 12). It also examines how such nostalgic poems in the twentieth century negotiate between idealizing and sentimentalizing working-class origins, families, and spaces. I will first establish briefly how nostalgia in the poems referred to above results in idealizations that nevertheless resist sentimentality and then demonstrate that the various forms of local speech employed in some other post-1945 poems about working-class experience set in Northern Ireland and in the US by Seamus Heaney, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Lucille Clifton act as a stay against both sentimentality and idealization, effectively transforming their poems into explicitly anticlassist – and, in the case of Brooks and Clifton, antiracist and antisexist–forms of social critique and defiance.[4] In their

instead recognizes the interdependence of units of people: family, community, friends, unions' (1999, p. 76). And yet working-class poetry in the twentieth century often asserts individuality against harsh social conditions that would obscure it. Paul Lauter also points up the group aspect of working-class experience, to which I am adding, along with Zandy, Christopher, and Whitson, family: 'Much working-class art is created and experienced in group situations–not in the privacy of a study, but in the church, the hall, the work site, the meeting hall, the quilting bee, or the picket line. It is thus rooted in the experiences of a particular group of people facing particular problems at a particular time' (2014, p. 65).

[2] For the poems quoted in this essay, I cite from either the print version of the poet's collected or selected poems the first time a poem is quoted and then proceed without citations. All of the poems discussed in this essay except Gwendolyn Brooks's 'Hattie Scott' and Lucille Clifton's 'study the masters' are available at the Poetry Foundation website: poetryfoundation.org. Clifton's 'study the masters' is available online at Yale University's *Reflections* magazine (https://reflections.yale.edu/article/sex-gender-power-reckoning/study-masters-poem-lucille-clifton). Brooks's 'Hattie Scott' is not available online.

[3] Hayden's poem was first published in a slightly different version in *A Ballad of Remembrance* in 1962. Wright's poem is from *The Branch Will Not Break* (1963). Levine's 'You Can Have It' is from his 1979 book *7 Years from Somewhere*.

[4] Lauter explains that traditional working-class figures have been neither women nor BIPOC: 'The traditional image of the American industrial worker . . . is male, in part because of ignorance about the role of women, historical and current, in United States industry. And the traditional image is also white, reflecting the racially

efforts to theorize working-class literature, Renny Christopher and Carolyn Whitson have asked, 'if poetry is defined as an intense distillation of language, rather than a portrayal of experience, and a working-class poem is one rooted in working-class experience, can a work even be said to be a working-class poem?' (72). They answer that question in part by acknowledging that '[w]orking class writers attempt, in various ways, to record the realistic speech patterns of people who do not speak standard English nor conduct conversations along intellectually analytic lines' (76). Paul Lauter has pointed out that these realistic, nonstandard speech patterns are especially amplified when sounded against the highly composed patterns of poetry: 'Language [in working-class poetry]. . . is often simpler, even commonplace and less 'heightened' than that of 'high culture' verse' (64). Such speech may not, in many cases, reach for the heights, but nonstandard speech has equal potential to go as deep as any other species of language when it is enlisted to make poetry. Like Christopher and Whitson, Brooks has also described poetry as 'life distilled,' and her poems, along with Heaney's and Clifton's, demonstrate that working-class speech can be the very material to achieve that distillation when it is patterned into poetic form (Brooks, cited in Gayle, 2003 p. 124).

Much poetry about working-class life harkens to a time of adversity and perseverance that is familial and familiar: such poems regularly situate themselves in family contexts and domestic settings. This desire to return to working-class domestic origins – origins that, such poems suggest, have been escaped – supplies such poetry with its definitive aspect: nostalgia. The word comes from the Greek *nostos* meaning 'return home' and *algia* meaning 'pain,' coined by a 17th-century physician named Johannes Hofer who identified it as a physical illness (*Oxford English dictionary* 2003, nostalgia entry). Nor in literature is nostalgia an untroubled element, for it skirts dangerously close to the sentimental, a quality thought inherently fatal to poetry in the twentieth century, especially after the breakthroughs of literary modernism, which sought to convey the complications of modern life by reflecting difficult emotional experiences via language rather than beautifying, inflating, or resolving those experiences. August Kleinzahler has suggested that Wright, like most of his post-1945 contemporaries and successors, has often fallen into the trap of literary bathos: 'Much of' his poetry 'drifts perilously close . . . to sentimentality' (n.d. *FSG*). But to Kleinzahler, Wright's 'Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio' is exemplary precisely because it avoids the sentimental: Wright in this poem, Kleinzahler says, 'manages to bypass sentiment and, in doing so, he succeeds in achieving an emotional intensity seldom encountered in American or British poetry of that era.' Avoiding sentiment, in other words, was a way toward a potent authenticity prized in twentieth-century poetry–and difficult to achieve. Kleinzahler attributes the circumvention of sentiment in Wright's poem to its countervailing formal attributes: 'The tone of voice is neutral, dispassionate, in counterweight to the material, a technique which serves to complement the poignancy of the poem. Localness is enhanced by the use of place names – Shreve, Tiltonsville, Benwood, Wheeling. We are in a specific place, in a particular window of time, but it is everyplace, throughout time.' In other words, Wright's poem keeps sentimentality at bay even as it evokes timelessness and omnipresence by balancing with localisms its impersonal tone and generic referents – Polish men drinking beer, Black men working at a furnace, proud

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segregated job structure that still persists in some industries' (63). Lauter, along with Nicholas Coles, has helped amend this omission in *A History of American Working-Class Literature* (2017), which includes chapters on colonization, early African American culture, women's writing in the early nineteenth century, slavery in nineteenth-century poetry, twentieth-century African American literature, and globalization and migration. Coles and Janet Zandy have also worked to fill these lacunae in their 2007 anthology of *American Working-Class Literature* that includes women and BIPOC authors from Phillis Wheatley in the colonial period to Lucille Clifton, who wrote into the twenty-first century.

fathers, 'clucking' wives, high school football players.[5] Hayden produces a similarly somber tone, though his poem's methods are not at all impersonal: the adult son's eloquent yet anguished regret builds palpably to the poem's pained repetition in its penultimate line: 'What did I know, what did I know.' Levine's poem, too, is thoroughly personal while also raising that quality to the level of paradigm: a young man listens to his brother and declares that 'each man / has one brother who dies when he sleeps.' The poem combines the brothers into a singular, representative figure: 'together they are only one man / sharing a heart.' These nostalgic poems about working-class life are not sentimental – their emotions are never manufactured but wholly authentic. They do, however, idealize their characters by presenting them as borderline archetypically tragic working-class figures: not only are Wright's men 'Dreaming of heroes' but their wives are 'Dying for love' and 'Their sons grow suicidally beautiful'; Hayden's adult son wisely regrets his youthful apathy toward a stoic father who used to polish his shoes; and Levine's speaker remembers when he and his brother valiantly 'stacked cases of orange soda for the children / of Kentucky.' Such poems looking back to the exigencies of working-class life are, it would seem, predisposed to idealization because they are, by nature of that backward look, nostalgic, the word itself deriving from a painful yearning to 'return home.'

This nostalgic aspect of such working-class poems links them to the 18th century nostalgia poem, a style of poetry created before the word *nostalgia* became 'a kind of catchall term for all forms of sentimental longing or regret' and referred more specifically to 'longing for home' (Santesso, 2006 p. 15). Santesso has established that in the eighteenth century 'nostalgia matured as a literary device' in classic poems such as Oliver Goldsmith's 'The Deserted Village' and Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.' Those and other eighteenth-century English poems effected this maturation by 'stylizing' nostalgia as impersonal precisely in order to idealize it (2006 p. 15). The eighteenth-century nostalgia poem, unlike, say, earlier nostalgic pastoral poetry, 'reflect[s] the influence of a literary tradition rather than personal experiences. Nostalgia, in other words, can be seen in a different way [from that earlier body of poetry]: as an impersonal, highly literary mode of idealization responding first and foremost to the concerns of the present' (2006 p. 13).[6] Santesso asserts that although nostalgia is generally defined in a poem as 'a desire for the past,' it is 'idealization' rather than longing that is the 'necessary' attribute of the nostalgia poem (2006 p. 16). Nostalgic poems about working-class life in the twentieth century effect idealization in ways that run contrary to the eighteenth century nostalgia poem: they make use of local and specific detail and advance highly personal impressions, affections, and contentions. We've already seen how Wright makes use of localities, Hayden pays late homage to a beloved but feared father, and Levine renders the shared bedroom of two adult brothers.

But what of twentieth-century poems about working-class ordeals that take this contrast to the eighteenth-century nostalgia poem even further, appearing to resist not just sentimentality but idealization? How do such poems, already embedded with nostalgia, prevent or at least interrupt and complicate the idealization of the familiar surroundings they seek to reenter? One

[5] Lucy Alford adds brevity to the 'working-class' formal features grounding Wright's poem: 'The poem could not take a single additional line. Its brevity is power, earthbound by the working-class proper names and population markers: Tiltonsville, Benwood, Wheeling Steel, Polacks and Negroes, grayed with labor as the watchman is ruptured by night and by long-held insomniac vigilance' (2020 p. 2).

[6] Santesso elaborates on Hofer's consideration of nostalgia as a 'malady' and as 'homesickness' (2006 p. 15). He concludes that a 'standard definition today' of literary or poetic nostalgia 'might be an intimately personal longing for the past–a stylized form of homesickness' (2006 p. 13). He also points out that as early as 1783, James Beattie had referred to nostalgia as a condition of 'natives of certain countries . . . d[ying] of a desire to revisit their native land,' revealing early on the term's sociopolitical inflections (2006 p. 14).

answer lies in those poems whose familiar working-class realms are not just temporal and spatial but linguistic. Representative examples by Seamus Heaney, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Lucille Clifton honor their characters' fortitude in the face of working-class encumbrances not by idealizing them but by concentrating on those working-class characters' linguistic origins.[7] Manifestations of local speech in these nostalgic poems amount to a poetic resource that disrupts idealizations of working-class experience, critiquing, in that process, classism and, in Brooks and Clifton, revealing classism's intersections with racism and sexism. These poems don't just desire to go back to earlier worlds but *do* go back linguistically to working-class, nonstandard languages–their particular forms of original local speech–that refuse the conditions that would subordinate those languages and the people who speak them.

Heaney's elegiac sonnet sequence to his mother, 'Clearances,' begins with an epigraph that relays both his mother's learning from her uncle and her teaching her son how 'to split coal' by angling the 'grain and hammer right' (1998 p. 282).[8] The lesson in manual work is a lesson for the work of poetry, too, for like his uncle and mother, the poet-son must learn 'to hit' and 'to loosen' precisely in order to make something usable. Part of the hitting, loosening music in Heaney's poems is produced from his regional speech, and he often punctuates his Northern Irish farm-life family memorials with examinations of such speech.[9] 'Clearances' elegizes Heaney's mother often by remembering her at work: for instance, the poems go back to the speaker's childhood farm to re-envision the floors, cups, bowls, and jugs she polished. In the third sonnet, the sequence comes closest to sentimental idealization, creating a tableau in its first eight lines – the sonnet's octave – of mother and son silently peeling potatoes together while everyone else is 'away at Mass' (1998 p. 285). In the sonnet's last six lines –its sestet – the son moves ahead in time to his mother's deathbed: while everyone else is praying and

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[7] Perhaps the most overt example of a poet whose entire career is marked by examining in poetry the sociolinguistics of working-class experience is Tony Harrison. I don't include Harrison here because I have recently written elsewhere and at length about the affiliations of working-class northern English speech and traditional forms in his most famous poems, those from the 'The School of Eloquence' sequence and his long poem '*v.*' (see Fogarty, 2020). In her book on Seamus Heaney, Rosie Lavan compares Heaney's poems chronicling his relationship with his working-class parents to Harrison's poems doing the same (2020 pp. 78-83). Neil Corcoran first made the link between the fourth 'Clearances' sonnet, discussed in this essay, and Tony Harrison in his classic study on Heaney's poetry: ''Clearances' 4,' Corcoran remarks, 'is virtually the territory of Tony Harrison's poems' (1998 p. 160).

[8] 'Clearances' consists of eight sonnets and appeared in Heaney's *The Haw Lantern* in 1987. A sonnet is, generally, a fourteen-line poem with various organizing principles typically determined by rhyme schemes. Two of the most well-known versions are the Petrarchan sonnet and the English or Shakespearean sonnet. Petrarchan sonnets are divided into two parts, an octave (eight lines) that typically sets up a problem, and a sestet (six lines) that resolves or attempts to resolve the problem. The English version that Shakespeare wrote in has three parts: three quatrains (four lines each) and a closing couplet (two lines). Petrarchan sonnets rhyme *abbaabba* (standard notation uses letters to show rhymes) in the octave and *cdecde* or *cdccdc* in the sestet. English sonnets rhyme *abab cdcd efef gg*. Sonnets at the time of Petrarch and during the English Renaissance were often employed to idealize the object of the poet's love or sexual desire. But sonnets have always been used–and continue to be used–for other purposes, often ironizing those original idealizing aims (*Princeton encyclopedia of poetry and poetics* 2012, sonnet entry).

[9] Adam Hanna helps clarify Heaney's working-class origins: 'Heaney's position in class terms is not straightforward. His upbringing in a thatched cottage in which he, three adults and eventually eight brothers and sisters were divided between three rooms could hardly be termed typically middle class. However, his father's status as a cattle dealer and small farmer who owned his own land put his family in a more secure position than many of their poorer neighbours. The class trajectory of Heaney's life was determined by his time as a boarder at grammar school in Derry, which initially gave him 'the notion that [he] was going to be a secondary school teacher, living the generic life of the newly upwardly mobile eleven-plus Catholic'. Heaney's ascent of the social ladder via the education system, and his membership of a religious minority whose urban working class was increasingly beleaguered, put him in a complex position when he achieved prominence' (2017 p. 337).

crying he's remembering the earlier scene of them working together: 'I remembered her head bent towards my head, / Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives— / Never closer the whole rest of our lives.' If that scene at least idealizes their relationship, the next sonnet swiftly undercuts that idealization. There, the speaker recalls pitching his language to his mother in order to maintain connection despite their different adulthoods: 'You / Know all them things,' his mother says to him with 'more challenge than pride,' with, in other words, a sense of estrangement; the speaker responds, 'So I governed my tongue / In front of her' because 'the wrong / Grammar kept us allied and at bay' (1998 p. 286).[10] The poem is, like the other sonnets in the series, nostalgic: the son here seeks to return to the kitchen where the mother worked, but rather than idealizing her or their relationship it presents them in a kind of linguistic contest. In fact, its sonnet structure seems to pit son and mother against each other as the octave and sestet each examines the other's manipulation of speech as a strategy to try to stay aligned despite their different experiences, making the mother's and son's conflicting versions of 'affectation' and 'betrayal' its primary subject matter rather than the son's nostalgic longing.

The poem's return to the past, then, is linguistic, marked by what it calls the son's 'relapse' into speaking 'wrong.' From the outset, while the son instrumentalizes nonstandard speech in order to connect to a mother whose formal education involves splitting blocks of coal, the mother stages her own lingual maneuvers to display her commitment to her class: 'Fear of affectation made her affect / Inadequacy.' She willfully injects errors into her speech to showcase loyalty to her working-class origins, origins that idealize being 'hampered and inadequate' as virtues. The son does the same thing: although he states outright that he throws the competition, pretending to know less when he knows he 'knows better,' the poem actually winds up enshrining the son's triumph over the mother: he can '*naw*' and '*aye*' all he wants, as the poems says, but they both know he 'knows better.'

Indeed, the poem scrutinizes both characters' efforts to use their language only *to seem* humble and uncomplicated, effectively repudiating those sentimentalized and stereotypical characteristics of working-class people. The lexical repetitions in the poem alone belie simplicity: 'affectation' and 'affect,' 'hampered' and 'hampered' again, 'inadequate' and 'adequate,' 'betray' and 'betrayal.' Other words in the poem reinforce a verbal environment that sidesteps the idealizations of elegy by denoting the guile and cunning that class distinctions necessitate even in the way a mother and son relate to one another: 'Fear,' 'askew,' 'well-adjusted,' 'challenge,' 'governed,' 'relapse,' 'wrong,' 'allied,' 'at bay.' Classism necessitates that mother and son must maneuver slyly to prevent becoming adversaries while the poem's familiar surroundings demand a semantic shrewdness to establish class allegiances. These verbal efforts to prevent competition are a competition itself, and the poem yearns partly to go back to that familiar, familial contest.

Gwendolyn Brooks also suggests idealization and nostalgia in her poetic returns to working-class life–but even more explicitly and consistently than Heaney, she refuses both by setting Black local speech in traditional verse forms to respond directly to the deleterious social

[10] Most recently, Rosie Lavan has explored the working-class elements of 'Clearances,' describing this poem as 'a remembered scene with mother and son [that] indicates that education has permanently altered the family dynamic' (2020 p. 79). Lavan reminds us that the phrase 'governed my tongue' is an especially significant one for Heaney: it recalls the name of his 'T. S. Eliot lectures [on poetry and politics] delivered at the University of Kent in 1986, published [eventually] as *The Government of the Tongue*,' one of his collections of prose (p. 80). Lavan remarks, 'the title . . . is significantly invoked here, as politic restraint is a protective measure to keep the peace between mother and son. What the son knows 'better' he knows not to introduce; he knows that his mother knows 'better' too, but there is a loyalty owed to origins, even if it entails for the child between worlds a performance which has itself become a kind of reverse affectation' (p. 79-80).

conditions that classicism, sexism, and racism produce. In ‘kitchenette building’ from *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945), Brooks’ first book, local language and the formal effects of poetry demonstrate that a tenement apartment in Chicago’s African American South Side neighborhood–the ‘hypersegregated center of Chicago’s Black Belt’ (Morgan 2017)–is not to be idealized in poetry even as it suggests so by centering on the word ‘Dream.’[11] Rather, the tenement supplies the actual raw material for arrangement into the forms of poetry. The poem is set within the walls of a building so suffocating it threatens to devitalize its residents: ‘We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan, / Grayed in, and gray’ (1987 p. 20). In this circumscribed world, people are reduced to ‘things’ and subjected to the monotony (‘dry hours’), coerciveness (‘involuntary plan’), confinement (‘Grayed in’), and drabness (‘gray’) of urban poverty caused and reinforced by systemic racist practices such as redlining.[12] Critics tend to read the poem as a condemnation of the debilitating effects of claustrophobic city life, thereby at least insinuating that the poem idealizes an escape from that life. Hannah Brooks-Motl, for instance, describes the poem as asking ‘us to think about what happens to people when social forces squeeze them into smaller spaces and closer proximity’ (2010). According to her, the poem has an underlying nostalgic quality: it conveys the struggle for dreams to survive in such crowded impoverishment.[13] But if the poem is concerned with life in close quarters and dreaming beyond them, it is also thinking about the function and persistence of language in those quarters. In fact, the poem quickly turns its attention away from the social ‘plan’ that creates degrading living conditions and begins ruminating not on dreams per se but on the sound of the word ‘Dream’ and contrasting it to local language: ‘‘Dream’ makes a giddy sound, not strong / Like ‘rent,’ ‘feeding a wife,’ ‘satisfying a man.’’ Here, the sounds of two kinds of language – one ‘giddy,’ one ‘strong’ – are juxtaposed, suggesting that the poem might contrast them and perhaps make a case for one over the other, say ‘Dream’ over ‘rent.’

However, the next stanza fuses these two registers of language:

> But could a dream send up through onion fumes
> Its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes
> And yesterday’s garbage ripening in the hall,
> Flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms.

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[11] Brooks has discussed her poetry as rendering the South Side Chicago neighborhood she lived in: ‘I wrote about what I saw and heard in the street. I lived in a small second-floor apartment at the corner [of 63rd Street in the ‘Bronzeville’ neighborhood of Chicago’s South Side], and I could look first on one side and then on the other. There was my material’ (1972 pp. 133-34).

[12] In her study of Chicago’s South Side in relation to American segregation and institutionalized racism, Natalie Y. Moore explains redlining: ‘By 1930, blacks were spatially isolated to a high degree in American cities, with Chicago leading the way. The Home Owner’s Loan Corporation was formed in 1933 as part of the New Deal and provided funds for refinancing urban mortgages in danger of default. But the Depression-era government program institutionalized redlining, a practice that excluded blacks by color coding black neighborhoods based on loan risk. The lowest color was red, where blacks lived. Redlining influenced lending practices of the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration of the 1940s with regard to blacks’. (2016 p. 42)

[13] D. H. Melhem claims that the tenement’s conditions in the poem defeat art: ‘The speaker doubts that art, ‘an aria’ sung by the dream, can survive its physical habitation’ (1987 p. 23). For Harry Shaw, ‘the environment’ of the tenement building ‘precludes the survival of any dreams’; the poem’s theme, he argues, is ‘spiritual death’ (1980 pp. 62-63). Brooks-Motl perceives the poem as more ambivalent than these earlier readings. Her overall view of the poem is that ‘agency and self-determination in the kitchenette are problematic at best,’ but she acknowledges that ‘its aural effects work effortlessly’ (2010). Although for her the poem ultimately communicates that dreaming could never be fully possible in a tenement, the fact that it can be partly possible suggests at least a little hope.

The poem answers the question it poses – can a dream in a kitchenette building 'send up,' 'fight,' 'Flutter,' or 'sing'? – by bringing the inanimate 'things' of the tenement –' onion fumes,' 'fried potatoes,' 'garbage,' 'rooms'– into concert through a series of overlapping sound effects that include internal and end rhymes ('fumes' and 'rooms,' 'white' and 'fight'), assonance ('white,' 'violet,' 'fight,' 'fried,' 'ripening'), alliteration ('fight,' 'fried,' 'Flutter'), and consonance ('fried,' 'garbage,' 'ripening').[14] These sounds strung along the mostly five-beat lines affirm that a kitchenette building doesn't need a dream to send up its fighting song. For the second stanza already set the 'things' of tenement life to song by melding the 'giddy' dream sounds and the 'strong' facts of tenement life. The 'dream' is described as the same color as a purple onion ('white and violet'), and although the first stanza seemed to contrast the dream's 'giddy sound' with 'strong' colloquial phrases about rent, wives, and men, the second stanza suggests that the 'dream' sound may be 'strong,' too – strong enough to 'fight.' Further, the long *i* sound of the second and third lines –' white,' 'violet,' 'fight,' 'fried,' 'ripening' – rises up with the strong odors of frying potatoes and yesterday's garbage. The 'ripening' garbage might not be pleasing, but the language used to describe it is. Here we have what Heaney would call in *The Redress of Poetry* a 'representation of things in the world' arranged into a 'process of language' that performs the very singing the poem wonders about (1995 p. 5). Apparently, the giddy sounds of tenement life can quite strenuously 'sing an aria down these rooms.' The formal effects of 'kitchenette building' sound out an unexpected and unidealized sense in a tenement: self-consciously poetic sound effects insist that the everyday, rather than idealizations of the everyday, is poetic.

Indeed, Brooks sets local language to poetic form in order to make a kitchenette building the catalyst for poetry with poetic sound effects and with larger verse structures. Stephanie Burt and Eavan Boland suggest that the poem varies the sonnet form, with its prescribed patterns and divisions, in order to depict the resilient vitality of the imagination in especially strapped circumstances (Burt, 2011; Boland, 2011). For them, as for Brooks-Motl, the poem draws out mostly an unfavorable sense of such day-to-day experience: this 'sonnet,' Burt argues, 'emphasizes the everyday inconveniences of low-income domestic life, as if to say that such hassles, hour by hour and day by day, do more to damage the souls of Chicagoans than any single dramatic event' (p. 311). Similarly, Boland considers the poem's depiction of daily life against what she also sees as its sonnet form: 'It is a cropped sonnet, a thirteen-line word-portrait of claustrophobia and resignation, with a sharp moment of resistance' (p. 214). For her, 'kitchenette building' acquiesces to the crowded conditions of tenement life: 'The poem begins accepting the limitations of cramped space.' She believes the poem ultimately conveys the reality of 'cooking scents' and 'the sounds of the day ending' in order to underscore the contradictions of 'longing for another reality' and the 'the fall-to-earth practicality' of its final stanza (p. 215):

> We wonder. But not well! not for a minute!

[14] Brooks-Motl (2010) reads the second stanza of 'kitchenette building' as particularly expressive of the building's deterioration. According to her, parts of speech are arranged here to convey the repugnant and detrimental assault on the senses that occurs in these tenement halls: 'Cooking onions become menacing when they produce 'fumes'; the smell of fried potatoes is so ubiquitous that the dream must 'fight' with them; and, most tellingly, the sanitary conditions of the building mean that garbage stays in the hall, 'ripening' and mingling with the other common smells. Against such olfactory concreteness, the 'dream' is barely allowed substance. It remains a stopped-short series of adjectives ('Its white and violet') and a series of verbs that correspond to contradictory subjects (people 'sing' while things 'flutter')'. Ultimately, she believes the poem responds to its question about whether or not dreams can survive in a kitchenette building with 'a definitive answer: not really.'

> Since Number Five is out of the bathroom now,
> We think of lukewarm water, hope to get in it.

Boland regards the poem as conceding to closed quarters not just at the beginning but with the 'practicality' of its ending as well.

And yet for both Burt and Boland, the vitality generated by the poem's sonnet-like features is only momentary. The poem, to them, doesn't manage a sustained redress of its debasing social context and is, presumably, one line shorter than a traditional sonnet because of it. Waiting for the 'lukewarm water' in the bathroom isn't just an inconvenient 'hassle' but actually 'damage[s]' the residents who have to bathe in it (Burt, 2011 p. 311). And tepid bathwater represents a return to the harsh reality of the first stanza's 'dry hours' (Boland, 2011 p. 215). Boland suggests that the poem divides its thoughts along its sonnet turns, moving from acknowledgement of the tenement's monotony to a bursting forth of linguistic exuberance and back again, yielding to that original monotony. But what happens if we take the poem's structural form at face value? We have three envelope tercets (three lines with the first and third line rhyming) with an envelope quatrain (first and fourth line rhyming) separating the first tercet from the last two: *axa cxxc fxf hxh*.[15] The quatrain stands among the tercets as an instance of the very singing the poem wonders about: apprehended this way, the poem's length subtly resists rather than concedes to confinements of context. Further, the last stanza of 'kitchenette building' continues to employ its opening sonic effects to counter the 'dry hours' that begin the poem. The lyrical 'wondering' that occurs in the second stanza helps pass the long 'hours' of tenement life – without idealizing that life or dreaming beyond it. By the final stanza, the residents have to move quickly because, as another fusion of 'giddy' and 'strong' language asserts, 'Number Five is out of the bathroom now, / We think of lukewarm water, hope to get in it.' 'Number Five' (referring to an occupant of apartment number five on the floor) and 'out of the bathroom' correspond to the 'strong' colloquial phrases in the first stanza. Along with 'lukewarm water,' they are also images taken directly from the kitchenette building. Yet simultaneously, the consonance of 'We,' 'lukewarm,' 'water'; 'think' and 'lukewarm'; and 'water,' 'to,' 'get,' and 'it,' as well as the double rhyme of 'minute' and 'in it,' sound like the 'white and violet' 'dream' of the second stanza. In other words, the last stanza continues to sing against 'the involuntary plan' of racist housing conditions. Indeed, the poem's ending anticipates that the 'hope' to get in the bathwater, however lukewarm, will be fulfilled, the 'dry hours' literally – and perhaps figuratively – countered. '[K]itchenette building' demonstrates that the 'strong' sounds of tenement life themselves can achieve the giddiness the residents dream about.

The first two poems in Brooks' five-poem sequence 'Hattie Scott,' another poem from her first book, also suggest sonnets without actually being sonnets as they depict an African American working-class woman in a manner that evokes and resists both nostalgia and idealization. The first poem presents an octave and a quatrain (rather than the sonnet's octave and sestet), at once conjuring and pulling away from that high cultural, idealizing form just as it conjures and pulls away from its own hints of idealization. In this first poem, 'the end of the day,' Hattie stares out the door as she finishes her work as a housekeeper, comparing that work romantically at first to the sun setting yet quickly checking such sentimentality by reconceiving the comparison in local speech. The poem imagines both Hattie and the sun saying at the end of the eighth line, 'Cap the job, then to hell with it' (1987 p. 51). The next poem in the sequence, 'the date,'

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[15] The standard system of notation to mark rhyme schemes is to designate them with a letter and sometimes to use *x* for words that don't rhyme.

continues this cool, hard, no-nonsense idiomatic style while also summoning the sonnet form without manifesting that form entirely. That second poem, 'the date,' also presents an octave (and only an octave), this time comprised of Hattie's idiomatic responses to a demeaning boss (1987 p. 52). Her retorts, though, aren't vocalized; she thinks them to herself but doesn't say them aloud because she has to keep her job. At the same time, the poem implies the condescending orders of Hattie's boss without actually presenting the boss's speech. What is evident is that Hattie is well used to workplace mistreatment that isn't just belittling but controlling and oppressive in a manner authorized by racism and sexism. And yet we only hear that racist and sexist abuse through Hattie's responses to it. In fact, we might say the boss's implied words constitute the 'missing' sestet if 'the date' were a complete sonnet. What's more, Hattie's speech also goes unheard by the boss even if the poem *is* her speech, for 'the date' is a litany of unspoken reactions to the boss who is callously indifferent to Hattie's time and personal life. Hattie can't respond aloud because she has to protect her livelihood, but if she can't say her replies, she can think them:

> If she don't hurry up and let me out of here.
> Keeps pilin' up stuff for me to do.
> I ain't goin' to finish that ironin'.
> She got another think comin'. Hey, you.
> Watcha mean talkin' about cleanin' silver?

The colloquial language here is straightforward, but the individual sentences sound somewhat disjointed, too, especially when Hattie says 'Hey, you' at the end of the fourth line and switches from 'talkin' about' ironing to polishing in the next one. According to Bill V. Mullen, the rhyme of 'you' with the second line's 'do' sounds especially precipitous because the phrase 'Hey, you' also represents a shift in the poem's diction: 'Here, the vernacular is the source and symbol of an unabashed working-class talk-back encapsulated in the abrupt rhyme of the shouted 'Hey, you.' The break in poetic diction, its interruptive quality, liberates Brooks's/Hattie's torrential voice of resistance' (1999 p. 169). Mullen hears in this poem the 'self-speaking and coherent' vernacular of 'black . . . female proletarianization' redressing the menial work conditions created by capitalism's race, class, and gender stratifications (1999 pp. 167-68).

The poem does more, though, than amplify 'coherent' working-class speech. Indeed, 'the date' does sound like 'talk-back' even though Hattie doesn't actually utter aloud her rejoinders. But the poem is half of a script for two characters rather than just a collage of plainspoken answers. Hattie is not literally talking back to her boss but thinking back to her in lines that imply spoken orders that go unheard in the poem. In other words, Hattie is responding in her head (or perhaps under her breath) to something like 'if you think you're leaving without finishing that ironing and polishing the silver, you've got another thing coming' and 'Hey, I'm talking to you' (as if the boss has mistaken Hattie's silence for inattentiveness). Hattie's present-tense replies indicate the boss's 'lines,' and she repels those condescending directives by defiantly repeating them while placing rhetorical stress on 'ain't goin',' 'She,' 'think,' and 'you': 'I <u>ain't</u> <u>goin'</u> to finish that ironin'. / <u>She</u> got another <u>think</u> comin'. Hey, <u>you</u>.' Hattie resists day-to-day reality by thinking in what sounds like a language for speaking, an effective method for poetic redress since the poem shuts out the boss's imposing speaking voice just as Hattie would be well used to shutting out that voice as she works. '[T]he date' counters the reality of Hattie's onerous and demeaning workplace, for although only the boss speaks aloud in the actual scene, we hear just Hattie. An imbalance, then, has been corrected: the poem voices Hattie's thoughts, and relegates her boss's talking to the background. Brooks employs colloquial language here to

demonstrate one's capacity for defiance even when that defiance cannot be articulated out loud. This working-class poem is nostalgic in the sense that it goes back to a domestic work place to reassert itself in, as Christopher and Whitson have it, 'the realistic speech patterns' of nonstandard speech. Further, this near-sonnet utilizes literary tradition not to idealize Hattie but to amplify that nonstandard speech while silencing her degrading boss–the poem returns to a domestic workspace to reverse Hattie's reality where the boss barks orders that Hattie must silently suffer.

Like Heaney, Lucille Clifton thinks of poetry as a family inheritance, and, like Brooks, she equates domestic work with poetic work. Also like both poets, Clifton is concerned with scrutinizing the language of working-class people who have gone unheard rather than idealizing working-class characters and experiences, this time not by reproducing actual working-class speech but by ruminating abstractly on nonwhite, female 'words.' In 'study the masters,' 'aunt timmie' represents a collective of unacknowledged word-'masters' whom the poem contemplates:

> it was her iron,
> or one like hers,
> that smoothed the sheets
> the master poet slept on.
> home or hotel, what matters is
> he lay himself down on her handiwork
> and dreamed.   she dreamed too,   words. (2000 p. 195)[16]

The poem does more than pay homage to Aunt Timmie's domestic 'handiwork.' By stating simply 'or one like hers' and 'home or hotel,' Clifton renders her aunt's experience as illustrative of working women of color, bordering on idealizing her: it is not Aunt Timmie's 'iron' alone but 'one like hers, / that smoothed' the master poet's sheets. Whether that ironing occurs in Timmie's home or in a hotel by an anonymous housekeeper, the alliterating *h* of 'home' and 'hotel' emphasizes the shared experiences of those locales and connects the 'handiwork' to both 'he . . . himself' and 'her.' The poem states that 'what matters' is not so much where but that there 'he' rests on 'her' work, a connection we hear in that repetition of *h* sounds and in the *d*, *r,* and *w* of 'down,' 'handiwork,' 'dreamed,' and 'words.' And yet even as the poem claims that his laying down on her work is 'what matters,' the blank space proceeding 'dreamed' suggests that the poem is doubling back on that estimation and on the potential idealization of Aunt Timmie: during the pause, it shifts its focus from the master poet back to Aunt Timmie's 'words.' What matters along with the fact that 'he lay himself down on her handiwork' is that those words emanate despite him. The poem names the woman who irons the sheets of the 'master poet' a 'master' herself.

Heaney's mother has her lingual strategizing, Brooks' 'Hattie Scott' has her Black- vernacular thinking, and Clifton's Aunt Timmie has her 'chanting as she iron[s]' to sound out against silencing forces. In fact, Timmie's dream, like that of any 'master poet,' is a dream of 'words,' in her case, 'some cherokee, some masai and some / huge and particular as hope.' As Cheryl A. Wall points out, the poem connects unheard workers directly to unheard poets: 'As the spatial arrangement of the lyric affirms, the worker's dreams are as important as the poet's; her

[16] Clifton's 'study the masters' appeared as one of the new poems in *Blessing the Boats: New and Selected Poems, 1988-2000* (2000).

song, no less than his, defines America' (2005 p. 541). Again, Clifton employs blank space to make a subtle movement: in the slight pause between 'dreamed, too' and 'words,' the poem imagines that Timmie the cleaner is also a poet–not only does she, like the master poet, dream 'too,' but her dreams are made of words like any poet's dream would be. Hers is a dream in language that derives from specific, nonwhite identifications. That the 'master' poet in this American poem is called a 'master' suggests the white supremacy that structures American society. Meanwhile, 'aunt timmie' has Native and African lineages. The poem refers generally to 'some cherokee' and 'some masai' words to emphasize that the 'master' being studied here is an American working-class woman of color with non-European ancestral ties. It portrays Timmie as a 'particular' working woman in one line ('it was her iron') and then connects her in the next line to a 'huge' community of women ('or one like hers'). The poem goes back to Aunt Timmie's home or hotel to recover a crucial voice of American existence that social hierarchies have attempted to eradicate: listening to Aunt Timmie's masterly chanting as she irons elucidates the link between 'form and line / and discipline and order / and,' as the poem's one-word final line tells us, 'america.' Likewise, the niece's depiction of that chanting is not a sentimentalized portrait of a hard-working family member but a lesson in craftsmanship: a formalized, lineated, disciplined, ordered Black female working-class language epitomizes the poetic language of 'america.'[17]

Poetry in any century we might say often seems to desire idealized worlds. And yet Heaney, Brooks, and Clifton resist idealizing the family figures in their working-class poems as they honor and even long for them. Rather, idealization in these twentieth-century poems is implied and then disrupted by, namely, Heaney's lingual betrayals, Brooks' Black vernacular arranged in traditional verse forms, and Clifton's American, female, nonwhite poetic constructions set wholly apart from those of the sanctioned white male American poet. Santesso claims that in the eighteenth-century 'poets were doing something more ambitious than expressing unthinking nostalgia: they were teaching their audience what nostalgia was and how to feel it–with specific, often political purposes in mind' (2006, p. 21). They employed nostalgia in order to idealize so that they could 'create a sentimental reaction' to contemporary issues and problems 'in a broad range of readers.' Idealization was a way, in other words, to elicit empathy. Working with nostalgia strategically, Santesso demonstrates, can be frustrating for a poet to the point of artistic crisis: how does a poet convey nostalgia in way that others will relate to it without sentimentalizing the origins it seeks to return to? The twentieth-century working-class poems discussed here demonstrate that one way to create relation to others while resisting sentimental idealization is to create a longed-for familiar environment that is linguistic; such poems wield nonstandard original languages not to universalize experience but to directly refute the conditions that would suppress them with particularized, local nonstandard speech.

What these working-class poems also illuminate is that as much as nostalgia is embedded in them so is the very concept of address: who is the speaker, who's being spoken to, what kind of language is in use, and what is the relationship between these factors? Brooks often explained her poetic ambitions in terms of address: 'My aim . . . is to write poems that will somehow successfully 'call'. . . all black people, black people in taverns, black people in alleys, black people in gutters, schools, offices, factories, prisons, the consulate; I wish to reach black people in pulpits, black people in mines, on farms, on thrones' (1972, p. 183). Clifton was likewise concerned with who her language was reaching: 'What I hope is to write poetry that

[17] For Wall, the poem 'posits a democratic ideal that revises our understanding of the heroic and the beautiful' by paying 'homage to past masters of American vernacular poetry, such as Walt Whitman and Langston Hughes'(2005 p. 541). Clifton is placing 'aunt timmie' alongside those male poets.

my Aunt Timmie can understand on one level; the cab driver can understand on another; and the Ph.D. can understand on yet another' (Clifton, cited in Witmyer 2001, p. 26-27). Finally, Heaney, who didn't discuss explicitly the address of his poetry but focused throughout his career on its redressing properties, conceived of nonstandard local speech as a way to write an 'answering poetry' and thus a 'responsible poetry': poems in the poet's 'own language,' he says, can produce 'an adequate response to conditions in the world' (1995, p. 191). Part of that adequacy in these poems is that they don't idealize working-class origins or, for that matter, conditions in the world. Rather, they go back to those origins linguistically in order to speak directly from or about those worlds and their conditions.

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Unfolding Layers of Labour: a Cross-Generational Account of Kinaesthetic Skills

Angela Costi, poet, freelance community writer and public servant

Abstract

Documenting migrant women's work through arts practice and community-engaged projects is a way of embedding their contribution to the history of working-class Australia. Through an analysis of Ancient Greek women's practice, migrant women's contribution to Australian labour, and poetic narrative incorporating oral history, this article highlights the kinaesthetic skills of the writer's Cypriot-Greek mother and grandmother. These skills are placed in the context of a market-driven system designed to turn skills into product and preference quantity over quality. The labour associated with making embroidery and garments is revisited through the writer's poetry and social justice lens. Two poems, *Kinaesthetic Grace* and *Making Lace,* which are informed by the labour and skills of the writer's mother and grandmother, are reinvented through an artistic collaboration with musicians and a filmmaker. The labour associated with this collaboration is unpacked as it resonates with the work of migrant women.

Keywords

Migrant woman, migrant worker, migrant labour, migrant working-class, factory work, kinaesthetic skills, arts practice, community-engaged practice, working-class poetry

Kinaesthetic Grace (part 1)

This woman talks to me with her hands
she always has, since birth
I have failed to grasp them.
I have followed the voices and text
I've found outside the home,
words on pages in whatever language, discipline or culture
bound by libraries,
left this woman to create her own story
with soil and seeds, flour and salt,
a cloth, a needle, a pot, an oven…
her fingers are an alphabet
I had no patience for.[1]

Poetic memoir

My mother, Eleni, is 74 years old and she still talks to me with her hands. They enter air as pen and paper remaking the book for her memories to turn story. Now that I have outgrown teenage

[1] The first section of a poem, *Kinaesthetic Grace*, by Angela Costi. This poem along with *Making Lace* will be interweaved throughout this article.

drive and have teenage children of my own, I sit still enough to see how her hands are the subtext to all of her stories. They are labourer's hands with ditches and trenches to mark stories of struggle with work. They are traveller's hands with dunes and ridges to unpack stories of challenge with culture. They are miracle maker's hands with rivers and gardens to host stories of conquest with tools. They speak of resilience despite the voice disclosing the wheeze of tired lungs.

In recent months, perhaps due to increase anxiety with COVID19 restrictions and being unable to visit her sister, go to Church nor hug her grandchildren, Eleni's hands are quiet. We sip our *briki* coffee or *tsai*[2] with milk and honey and work out ways to live without touch.

Oral story and context

There's her default story; the one that makes her hands twitch when she's in the thick of telling. At one point, they become the needle of the sewing machine as she recounts how she began working at the clothing factory when she was 13.[3]

I wanted to go to training school to become a nurse, but my mother said there was no money to send me, my father said no daughter of his was going to wipe the shit off men's arses. My English was very broken back then. My oldest sister lied about my age so I could work with her at the factory.

The machines never stopped making noise and sewed up women's hands by mistake. I was the lucky one to escape the drill of the needle and thread. After seven years, the boss said my hems and sleeves were the best but I wasn't quick enough. He gave me another job inspecting the quality of the clothes. My daily quota was 2,500 garments. I had to scan the clothes for flaws and staple labels on them at the same time. I got $10 a day if I met the quota. If I did more, I got a bonus.

This was in the 1960s and 1970s when working conditions in Australian factories were not monitored and regulated as much as they appear to be now. Certain documented, community-engaged arts practices[4] have brought to the fore the contribution of migrant female factory workers to the Australian workforce:

Australia has the largest overseas-born workforce outside of Israel. At least half of the population of Perth and Melbourne are products of post-1945 settlement. Of all women working in Australian industry, 60% are born overseas (Duke, Lyssiotis, Mehes 1986, p. 12).

Eleni vividly recalls both the bullying work expectations of her boss and the sense of pride and purpose her working life gave her.

It was not right the way he pushed the seamstresses. He was short so he would get up on top of the table and look down on us to see how hard we were working. One day I got a pile of blouses with the buttons uneven, they looked terrible. I told him you have to stop pushing the

[2] *Briki* coffee is made with a small stove-top pot and *tsai* is the Greek word for tea.
[3] Eleni Veronika Costi speaks her stories using a combination of Greek and English, and a Cypriot dialect.
[4] For example, a seminal collaboration of visual arts responses to 'the problems and experiences of working women in Australia' in 1983-4 culminated in a book, *Industrial Woman,* documenting both studies, visual art and poetic responses.

women like that, you will lose your supplier, stop the quotas, get the quality right. But he didn't listen. He lost the main supplier.

She was prone to depression and unsuited to the life of a 'stay-at-home' mother even if that were a possible option. As a 14 year old, I recall assisting her at the Thomastown factory during my school holidays. Her pace was unrelenting and her attention to detail was uncompromised. She took minimal breaks like many of the other women. By now, she was one of the senior workers but never given a supervising role because she was a migrant woman with minimal English literacy.

Kinaesthetic Grace (part 2)

This is the woman who knows how to hold
with her lined and stained hands
the story of all other women
we service with a system of pay-outs,
women of colour on the General Motors assembly line[5]
playing the conveyor belt like an instrument
they will never learn,
Hispanic women wearing the paper masks as they spray
jeans and their lungs into shreds,
and her fingers twitch when they tell
of the Thomastown factory's sewing machine
stitch by never-ending stitch
bleeding before a stop for break
the dip and throb of migraine fighting quota.

Kinaesthetic inheritance

Eleni left the factory to work alongside her husband, my father, Kostaki, in various shops selling fish and chips, fruit and vegetables, and finally landing on the one retail that took them through to retirement, selling flowers. She became a self-made florist learning the intricate wiring techniques to tame stems into a confluence of colour, bloom and scent. Again she worked tirelessly from 4 am to 6 pm, daily, to fill and refill the shop with glorious Australian buds and blossoms.

Whether it was making something out of fabric to be worn by fashionistas, or entwining eucalypt with protea, or making a suite of Cypriot dishes for a party of 60, her hands hardly rested. They propelled her into this world of making that she inherited from her mother, my grandmother, Maroulla Elliseou.

Maroulla worked with linen and cotton to make detailed embroidery, stitch by stitch, working with white, brown and ecru thread. She started at a very young age, in her early teens, in a small village called Vasa in Cyprus. In the main room of the house, sitting on a chair with a cushion on her lap and carefully crafted multitudes of tableware, linenware, bedware, and the essentials for dowry chests. She was one of the women of Cyprus renowned for their

[5] Informed by the studies on intersectional systemic discrimination based on racism and sexism exemplified by the US case of the Black women factory workers taking a car manufacturer to court.

Lefkarathika[6] intricate embroidery skills. She was in high demand, working day and night to meet the market demand as close as Italy and as far away as America, shipped from Nicosia port. It was the Venetians who started this global trend, as during their occupation of Cyprus (1489-1571) the ruling classes holidayed in the picturesque, mountainous villages and the local women were said to have adapted the fine embroidered clothes of the Venetians into their own intricate network of stitches (Belloni 1999, p. 59).

Interestingly, Maroulla married much later than other women in her time – at the 'ripe' age of 24 years old. Her skills enabled her to rise above poverty even when her husband, my grandfather, Pappou Elliseo, journeyed to Australia seeking work, leaving her with five children, she had her embroidery to fall back on.

I remember my mother sitting and making this perfect lace. My sister and I were never as good as her. We cleaned the house, cooked the meals, took care of the chickens and goat so your Yiayia could make the money to buy us food, keep us clothed.[7]

Impact of labour

Both Maroulla and Eleni made the most nourishing creations, but the imprint on me was not the product. It was the impact of work on their lives. As they got older, their nimble fingers were stiffened by arthritic pain, they took heavy painkillers to continue, and their pay, working conditions and career status were overpowered by a gendered and discriminatory economic system.

The work of these women is overlooked and undervalued and they are ignored by a society which welcomes their labour but overlooks the visible realities they face trying to become active citizens in a new homeland (Duke, Lyssiotis, Mehes 1986, p. 21).

A lack of respect for traditional craft and the value of women's labour is a continuing struggle as evidenced in the wide-spread retrenchments and closures of clothing and textile factories. Not that long ago, '25 February 2009, Pacific Brands announced the closure of seven of its factories across Australia and the loss of 1850 jobs' (Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia (TCFUA) 2011, p. 3). Many of these jobs were embodied by migrant women.

When we had just one job to do, it was mentally difficult. When you just see one thing day after day, after a while you could be blind and still thread cotton. You could feel if the fabric was good or not good, you didn't need to think. Your arms 'knew' the garment (anonymous worker at Bonds Factory, Unanderra, TCFUA 2011, p.16).

An undervalue of kinaesthetic skills doesn't appear to be mirrored by Ancient Greek[8] deities. Ananke, a primordial deity and the personification of inevitability, compulsion and necessity, held the spindle during her reign. Spinning and weaving though was assigned to female deities, most notably Athene the Goddess of wisdom, handicraft and warfare. In reality, the life of a

[6] This is the Cypriot name for intricate embroidery, which became world known when in the fifteenth century Leonardo da Vinci visited Cyprus and took a Lefkara lace back to Italy with him to decorate the Duomo Cathedral in Milan.
[7] Words of Eleni Veronika Costi.
[8] A focus on Ancient Greece as distinct from other ancient civilisations given my award to study in Greece in 1995, and that both my parents are Cypriot-Greek with Greek language (although ancestral research reveals my father's Armenian ancestry).

female in Classical Athens was anything but empowering. Textile production was confined to the domestic economy, which meant that 'women in the home were responsible for preparing the fleeces, for spinning thread and for weaving lengths of cloth on the loom' (Blundell 1995, p. 141). This was back-breaking work and 'better-off women had slaves who did the bulk of the work' (Blundell 1995).

The theme of these traditional skills becoming paid labour journeyed with the migration to Australia of women from the Mediterranean and the Middle-East in the early to mid-1900s. Many women, including my mother and grandmother, arrived with no or limited education and nominal English literacy. What they did possess was ingenuity with their hands and a determination to survive. Their contribution to the household income enabled the family to cross over the poverty line into the working-class (Zelda D'Aprano 1995, p. 5):

When Leon started school, mum sought employment to subsidise the family income and, because she was totally unskilled industrially, she came to an agreement with a local eiderdown manufacturer to teach her to hand-sew eiderdowns. During the first week, she plied her needle and thread without a knot and practised the skill required for her to become proficient. At the end of the week, the boss who was an acquaintance of the family, and knew our circumstances, paid her four shillings. Mum was embarrassed and refused to take it for she had not produced anything, but he insisted that she accept the money and so she had her first pay which was spent on a pair of socks for each of the children. From then on, she worked part-time in various factories and became a skilled finisher in the clothing trade.[9]

Well into the 1950s, Cypriot women arrived on their own to be betrothed to a photo they held onto or with their children to meet their husband after being years' apart. An unknown destiny in a foreign land fortified their skills.

Despina Pavlou has a stall where she sells children's clothes. Her husband is a linesman and they live in suburban East Burwood but his wages are not enough for them to carry out their aspirations for their six children. So Despina rises very early every day, gets the family off, has a cup of tea and sits at her sewing machine until midnight. She sells her goods at the market and makes about fifty dollars for her week's work (Larkins and Howard 1980, p. 64).

Both Despina Pavlou and my mother, Eleni, wanted a less labour intensive life for their offspring. Eleni had a habit of fanning out her palms before my face to prove the ugliness of her labour. Often there was an additional callous with its yellow hardened crust, or palm lines underscored by slashes of red, and always band aids curled around fingers to hide those cuts still weeping. This was meant to be a warning if I dared to drop out of Uni, which was constantly on my mind. Her ambition was to see me escape her plight of labour:

'I want your hands to always be this soft.'

She still reaches out for my hands, hoping they remain softer than hers. My tools are pen, paper and keyboard and so my hands are unharmed. They display no physical scars. Though Eleni is not naïve, she connects my long hours staring at the screen with a system predicated on key

[9] Zelda D'Aprono's autobiography is a detailed account of her personal and political life in order to provide a comprehensive account of working-class women's contribution to the Women's Liberation Movement in Australia. This quote from her book is about her mother who arrived from Palestine to Melbourne, in the early 1900s.

performance indicators – the reinvention of quota targets. Her work and my work interlink at the junction of inheritance knotted with class, sex and culture.

Despite 'social distancing', her palm will continue to stroke my hand. It will continue to feel like sandpaper, and I will continue to weave her story into the threads of my poetry, which I write in the early mornings before opening the laptop to meet schedules and deadlines.

Kinaesthetic Grace (part 3)

This is the woman
silenced by statistics.
We must search for her
not in photo albums nor newspapers,
we must go out to the wild woods
where there are trees left to grow old,
like hunting for prized truffles
we must smell, touch, taste,
and when we see her
hold out our hands
as children willing to learn.

Continuum of kinaesthetic skills

Yiayia Maroulla suffered from severe dementia and died many years ago in a nursing home. Eleni is beginning to stumble with daily recall but her memory of long ago remains vivid. Their labour and aptitude hasn't transitioned in me becoming adept at turning cloth and linen into tablecloths, bedspreads and clothes. Still, I am a creation of these women, and I in turn offer an intricate sequence of threads through poetry-making. Since 1994, I have taken the threads of their stories and weaved them with mine.[10]

Making Lace (part 1)

I see her as I see me, sitting on chairs before the impact of our craft,
both intent on making a story from a sequence, a gift out of repetition,
her stitch is my letter, her design is my phrase,
thread weave through out and in.

Documenting the threads

Before COVID19 infiltrated our environment, I was invited by the Greek-Australian Cultural League of Melbourne to be a featured poet as part of their Antipodean event and exhibition at Steps Gallery, Lygon Street, Carlton. This was a major occasion for not only the Greek-Australian community but other Mediterranean and Southern European communities. The 2020 theme was particularly significant as its focus of 'Connection' was a collaboration with First Nation elders and leaders.

[10] One of my first poems to be published in 1994 was *Visiting Yiayia* in Australian Multicultural Book Review.

A unique intercultural dialogue promoting awareness and acceptance of cultural diversity through the sharing of art, music and storytelling, acknowledging this Land's original custodians, and the opportunities it offered to the many Greek migrants.[11]

Along with a plethora of arts events, it was cancelled. This event couldn't be reinvented through an online platform as a significant number of the audience comprised older generation Greeks with no computer access, limited connectivity, or a strong preference for this event to be rescheduled when it was safe to do so.

The City of Melbourne, with its COVID19 Arts Grants[12], offered another way for me to present my poetry to this audience of older migrants, a similar generation to that of my mother. In April 2020, I applied for a grant to enable me to work with a filmmaker and musicians to develop a series of my poems into videopoems. These videopoems would be promoted by the Greek-Australian Cultural League via accessible online platforms and a venue when restrictions eased.

Gratefully City of Melbourne provided enough funding for a collaboration with musicians and a filmmaker with regard to four of my poems. Two of which honour and reflect on the kinaesthetic skills of Eleni and Maroulla and cover the themes unpacked in this article.

Making Lace (part 2)

she is the story on linen,
no longer woman in small village sitting under a tree for days months years
of thread weave through out and in, our skin
an embroidery of old maps and new
Lefkara, Larnaca, Kyrenia, Hartchia,
Riverwood, Bankstown, Lalor, Reservoir
thread weave through out and in

Working with diverse women artists

The title for the videopoems project is *An Embroidery of Old Maps and New,* which is a line from the *Making Lace* poem. This title highlights the journey of labour from grandmother to mother to daughter as a form of inheritance. The title also informed the collaborative approach to making the videopoems. Four women came together bringing their individual skills as additional layers to make the complete product. These four women include myself as the poet and narrator in the films. Sofia Chapman and Alana Hunt, who are the core of VARDOS, composed the music. VARDOS is a renowned trio of musicians playing the violin, accordion, double bass, trumpet-violin and other associated instruments to create their own adaptation of folk and Romany music.[13] Sofia and Alana brought the spirit of migration, journey and tradition to the 'workshop' with their composition of music and sounds.

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[11] Greek Cultural League Newsletter No.1/2020, March 2020.
[12] These arts grants by the City of Melbourne have been offered to a wide-range of creative projects https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/arts-and-culture/strategies-support/funding/Pages/assistance-creatives-covid-19.aspx
[13] Since 1993, VARDOS have been playing their music, which they learned firsthand from Roma (Gypsy) musicians during their many travels and stays in Eastern Europe. https://www.vardos.com.au/bio.htm VARDOS also have a history of collaborating with Angela Costi on various projects, including the Saloni M artist collective and events. http://www.innersense.com.au/salonim/projects/2005/index.html#index

The fourth artist to enter the workshop was Faezeh Alavi, an Iranian filmmaker and actress who in 2016 arrived in Australia to escape political and civil unrest in Iran.[14] Her contribution was a combination of skill and insight; not only videography and film editor, she brought with her the insight of seeking refuge and resettlement in a foreign environment. Her selected and idiosyncratic images brought both traditional and contemporary resonance to the themes of women's labour and migration of skills.

During the collaborative period, May to June 2020, the Northern suburbs in which all four of us resided were in various stages of 'lockdown' due to the COVID19 pandemic. In early May, we were able to meet at the workshop space provided by VARDOS and map the various threads of word to music, image to sound, story to composition. Meeting my mother, Eleni, who inspired the two poems however was out of scope given her vulnerable health and self-isolation. The long phone conversations with Eleni during this period confirmed her commitment to her history and my permission to retell through my arts practice. The period of self-isolation opened Eleni's memory to witness her mother's labour and the value of sacrificial work for a 'better life' for future children.

Making Lace (part 3)

she lives in each strand of cotton perle, the white, brown and ecru,
she makes houses, rivers, wells, trees, caves
for secret lovers, lost children, dying soldiers,
she peeks through *gofti*,[15] through fairy windows, and sees me,
letter by letter, crossing the keyboard
thread weave through out and in,
she sees her children's children not work in fields harvesting rotten crops,
not work in factories making hard, rough, poisonous things,
not work in shops selling dry, fried food,
she sees a series of baby girls named after her, dressed in white,
she lives in the stroke of a foreign letter by letter, word by word,
thread, weave through out and in.

Product of collaboration

The first film produced was *Making Lace*. The VARDOS music brings to the fore a sound resonate with repetition and dedication to tradition and craft. It provides the cloth, if you like, to the voice and series of still and moving images. These images fade in and out, stitch by stitch. We begin with a closeup of a blinking eye that reveals a fish swimming through its retina, watching the woman's hands create with the traditional tools of textile craft. A younger photo of me, in my late 20s, which could be my mother's face, is overlayed with moving images of land signifying village life. And then the Duomo Cathedral emerges to convey the legend of how the embroidery gained global resonance. Still the hand is poking at the cathedral's turret and takes over the scene with older women's hands continuing to make. The surreal subsumes reality as we end with lace curtains fluttering in the wind – our fairy windows to brighter days.

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[14] Faezeh Alavi in May 2020 received her permanent residency, which confirmed her Melbourne-based practice and ability to work on the project. https://www.imdb.com/name/nm8389112/
[15] *gofti* is a term used by Cypriot-Greek lace makers to refer to the holes they embroider in their intricate work.

However, producing the videopoem for *Kinaesthetic Grace* has proven to be challenging. Given the strong emphasis in the poem on factory life, all four of us (poet, musicians and filmmaker) were determined to find a factory site. During the period of eased restrictions we were able to have discussions with tenants, owners and workers of various factory sites. Some of these sites were abandoned, some were in use and some were new factory sites. The issues with accessing these sites for filming were not concerned with risks associated with spread of the virus, rather they feared public liability and potential damage to reputation. One factory owner alluded to the poem being too political. At the time of writing, we still haven't successfully located a site for filming, and now the restrictions in the North of Melbourne where we live and where the poem locates the factory, are severe as community transmission has peaked.

This hasn't stopped the research and access to images that signify the essence of the poem. We have viewed the series of photo stills of women's hands sewing garments at the Bonds, Unanderra, NSW factory, just before it closed in March 2010 (TCFUA 2011, Bailey 2011). These series of photos are filmic in themselves as they capture second by second the work required to sew a garment together. They distil both experience and skill required to avoid the drill of the needle drawing blood, to create the seamless feel of an iconic Bonds t-shirt.

Garment worker's hands, Bonds factory, NSW. Photograph by Angela Bailey.

Conclusion

Spinning, weaving and sewing associated with the skills of Ancient Greek women continues throughout centuries to embody women's work. This continuum of pride connected to the ability to produce desirable product is cast with pain incurred through the relentless repetition and long hours. Community-engaged projects such as *Work on the line* demonstrates through

artistic collaboration the significance of migrant women's work to the history of Australian textile manufacture.

Furthermore, creatively documenting the personal narratives of migrant women's skills and work contributes to our contemporary study of women's significant contribution to global industrialised labour. Both autobiographical (Zelda D'Aprano 1995) and biographical (Eleni's oral memories) provide the detail of observation and reflection inspiring a community-engaged, collaborative arts project. Older Greek migrants (as well as others from the Mediterranean, Middle-East and Europe) are keen to view stories that resonate with their experience and reflect their contribution to Australian history. Through the arts project, *An Embroidery of Old Maps and New,* a poet, two musicians and a filmmaker informed by their own cultural heritage, study and travels, endeavour to make videopoems that add to the knowledge of women's work with hands.

Author Bio

Angela Costi studied Law/Arts at Melbourne University enabling her to practice as a lawyer and she is currently a public servant within the social justice sector. In her mid-20s she left legal practice and resumed studies. She completed the Professional Writing and Editing course at RMIT. She also received a travel award from the National Languages Literacy Board in 1993, which enabled her to study Ancient Greek drama in Greece. From 1995, she has also freelanced as a community writer working within a community-engaged framework to create collaborative art with diverse groups or collectives. She was the writer and co-creator of the *Relocated arts project,* which was commissioned by the City of Melbourne and received the national award for Innovation and Excellence in community services 2002. She is the author of four poetry collections and her writing has been published in journals, including *Hecate, Southerly, Meanjin* and *Overland*.

Acknowledgment

I'm grateful to Helena Spyrou for her guidance as she was employed by the TCFUA to produce the arts-based project *Work on the line,* and a series of nationwide projects involving the retrenchment of women working within the clothing and textile industry of Australia. Also, thank you to Angela Bailey who provided permission to use her photo.

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Two Poems: 'The Goddesses of Democracy Go Out Drinking and Dancing', 'Josephine Habeck Kurth'

Lita Kurth

The Goddesses of Democracy Go Out Drinking and Dancing

After work, we get ready
at a small stained sink, I
scrub grime from my hands
At home, plug the gap in the window
with a rag, take a shower, pull the slow
recycled razor up my legs
with a cut and a frown
dry with a thin towel
rub in Vaseline, or lotion
one of the cheaper brands

All us musesm nymphs, and little goddesses
press Walgreens lipstick
to our lips, brush blusher across
cheekbones, a little flutter
in our hearts, holding a wand
to blacken lashes, spray cologne, pull
over our best bra, our best tight top
loop dangly earrings into holes
shove supple thighs in leggings, determined
toes in high-heeled, squeaky boots

Passing the lawn surrounding a bank
We steal red roses and put them
behind our ears
bring glory to the gritty bus
when we board old men revive
boys sneak looks at legs, mothers sigh and
younger girls in PayLess flipflops
play with plastic dolls and dream

Soon we'll dance ecstatic
even haughty men will bow
send down the bar expensive drinks crave
numbers, glances, remarks

we’re smokin’, and see
desire in passing hands and eyes
waiting at the bar
for an irresistible song
sipping rum and Cokes, casting
the slowest of looks
toward used-to-bes
and just-abouts

Josephine Habeck Kurth

‘I never woke up earlier than Ma and never stayed up later than her,’
Dad fell asleep to the whir, whir, whir of the spinning wheel
Ma making yarn from her own sheep’s wool that she sheared
herself, washed, and dried and carded. In the winter, click click click
of knitting needles constructed her family’s mittens, socks, and caps.

She loved the fields, her chickens and sheep, but fifteen kids
kept her indoors cooking and filling the stove with wood
Once, she cracked an egg over a sizzling pan
and out fell a chick to a broiling death. She put her apron to her face,
sat on a bench, and cried

Sometimes she made a little burnt loaf of bread— for herself.
She liked it that way—and said, ‘Billy, go get me some onion tops
out of the garden.’ When he returned with a fistful,
she dipped them into a glass of vinegar, buttered the fresh hot bread,
and they two ate butter bread and onion tops.
I too ate butter bread and onion tops with my father once
at our table on a cracked blue gingham oilcloth.

Ma was round as a barrel but she could run fast
chasing her kids around the table, belt in hand.
Even in formal pictures, she wore a simple dress, oxford shoes,
hair combed straight back in a ponytail or bun.

The last twenty years of her life, the only time I knew her,
she lay in a hand-cranked hospital bed in our living room
only able to move her head, not her arms, nor legs. Polio pinioned
that tireless body. I brought a bent glass straw to her lips,
she still told stories of Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox
and talked in a cracked voice to her little blue parakeet
— ‘Pretty bird’ in a cage on a dresser by her bed.

Author Bio

Northern Wisconsin-born **Lita Kurth** was the first in her family to attend not just college, but high school (both parents, though intelligent, had to leave school after 8th grade). Thinking a college degree alone was a ticket to prosperity, she majored in French and History. Eventually, she became a poet, novelist, and writer of creative/literary nonfiction as well as a writing teacher. Her work has been nominated several times for Pushcart Prizes and Best of the Net awards and won the Diana Woods award from Lunchticket for 'This is the Way We Wash the Clothes,' a piece she presented at a Working-Class Studies conference in Madison, Wisconsin. She teaches at De Anza Community College and in private workshops.

Three Poems: ‘Albuquerque Summer’s Day’, ‘#3’, ‘#5’

Jason Yurcic, poet, activist, human being

Albuquerque Summer’s Day

For an angry man like myself
The miracle is not to walk on water
It is to be here
In spite of the pain they have administered with their ploys
I love being poor
Love that everything I own I have made with my own hands
Love that there are holes in my socks
Because my children have ten pairs of socks
And they will never know my pain
Never be laughed at for being uneducated
Never know what it feels like to live without their father
They will never know my pain
And I love that
Love that after I tore the ass out of my work pants
That my 9-year-old daughter can teach me to use her sewing machine
Her slender hands working the hem line
And I can use the pants for another 5 years
Here I sit in the heat
The heat of an Albuquerque summer day
Heroin spoon over candle flame heat
The heat of an Albuquerque summer day
And the clouds know my name
The Harvester ants know my name
And the clerks at Hollister or the Gap
Have never seen my face
And I am proud to have nothing in the eyes of others
Proud that I love dirt under my nails
Here I sit in the heat of an Albuquerque summer day
Glass pipe, lip and finger blister heat
And I give myself to the clouds
The leaves
The blue sky
Brown mountain
Give myself away for nothing at all
In a world where we are taught
Nothing is free
I sit here in the heat of an Albuquerque summer day and
I am free

#3
I give my mind away sometimes when I'm at work
Give it away to an opaque corridor
Inside me
Cussing
          Spitting
Damning my fate
Stuck here
In the land of the uneducated
Bent back, muscle torn, lip jockey
Talkin' shit about the uppities that pass by the front gate
In their gas guzzling SUVs and Mini-Coopers while my old truck
   with a quarter million miles sits rusted by the fence

I stare at the front gate
Every second's break I get
From the nightmarish horror show of hard labor I'm in
Like it was a blanket under a tree in a clearing by Rio Grande River
When 'Shorty' pulls in
Driving his son's red convertible Mustang
New boots, belt, jeans
Smiling
He has the most beautiful knowledge in his words
The kind of knowledge you can't get from a book
you can't pay for with a college tuition
Can only get from a lifetime of hard labor
It's payment is blood, sweat, torn ligaments, and pain
His bulging forearms
Calloused hands
Sun-beaten skin
Show me how I'll look 10, 15 years from now
If I don't get out of this work
But I also see
These brilliant brown eyes
Sparkling with contentment and acceptance
He knows his life is to work like this
He has worked like I do for nearly 30 years
Without a complaint
Worked hard to have a good life
A small piece of land on the outskirts of town
200 chickens
Two horses
And a dog
'I haven't worked in three days,' he says while looking into his palms.
                                        'My hands are getting too pretty.'

My mind moves over from the gloom
While I speak with him
His voice is low, humble
Like a spring river of mountain snow that has worked its way down

bone-breaking cliffs
To gather in front of one last cluster of fallen trees
Spill over the lips to finally reach the ocean
Where it doesn't boast, but mixes with its environment and
becomes fleeced
With the movement of nature
And I learn from him
As I always have
Learn to accept myself
If only for awhile
Learn that the life I live is not so bad, because I get to speak to men
with strong spirits like him

When he leaves, I feel like I am losing a part of myself that I don't
even know yet
And the nightmare closes in around me again
When I reach down for my pick and shovel
Dust filling my lungs
Scratching my eyes
Cussing
Spitting
Damning my fate.

#5

Now that I work
In one place every day
My former co-workers come around to visit

The ones I shared my pot with in hopes of drowning myself
In THC to forget my failures
The broken bottle path I followed
While driving to and from
Several worksites in a day
Live *borrachera* (a drunken lifestyle)
Fighting in musty saloons and rundown one-stool cowboy bars
after work

Today it was Blanco
He pulled up in his 1974 Chevy Dually pick-up
Radio blaring Northern New Mexico Ranchera Music
Stops just inside the gate and blows into a chrome-plated police
whistle
That he uses to call in his horses from pasture

I talk with him for awhile in the shifting shadow
Of a wind-blown tree
Talk about how his life has been going

While he speaks
Through a giant smile
A black push broom mustache
I try my best to listen to him
Since I am him and know
The rest of society has pushed us so far out
That no one truly listens anymore

And I thank the Creator for helping me listen

Seeing his leather-like face
his battered hands
I give praise to his heart
When he lays right on the ground and kicks back
toying with pebbles and sticks
While telling horror stories of jobs gone wrong
Under the guidance of college grads with clean hands
People who were afraid to get dirty
But didn't mind telling him to

Seeing how every concrete finisher
Black finger-nailed construction worker is as angry as I am
Angry at the world
And the fact it has turned them/me away
Made us feel dirty and uneducated
Until we believed it
And lost the right to be who we are
But I know for sure Blanco doesn't care for MBAs or PhDs
He loves his horses
His ranch

Most of us are
In the general sense
Uneducated
Most don't read books
Most read sale signs on liquor store marquees and cooler fronts
But we know how to read a man's eyes
Can tell by the direction a horse turns in the wind if the rain is coming

This poem is written for them
My hard working, hard-hearted brothers
We built the streets
These buildings
These towns
Because of us children have a place to learn
Playgrounds at parks
Because of us dirty, uneducated men
Fools and losers
Unshaven faced
Scowling men

With soiled clothing
Or however the mainstream wishes to categorize and judge us
Most, including myself
Will never see our true beauty
Because of the way we are looked at in supermarkets and retail stores

Before Blanco leaves
He blows into the breathalyzer ignition of his truck
Spins his tires in the street
And yells like on a warpath atop one of his horses
I give praise to his reckless abandon
his bullheaded defiance of society.

Author Bio

Jason L. Yurcic, a pain based poet, has published 4 books of his work. His first release *Voice of My Heart* (Sherman Asher Publishing), was awarded runner-up in the 2007 NM Book Awards. *Poems by Jason L. Yurcic* (Verna Press), *Word Son* (EMAYA Publishing), and *Odes to Anger* (West End Press) also runner-up NM Book Awards 2009. His first play, *Little Ghost*, won a national competition and was produced by Nicholas Sabato and the Santa Fe Performing Arts in '09.

Jason L. Yurcic was functionally illiterate until the age of 25 years old when he sat down to try and compose a suicide letter to his family. As he tried to express his feelings, he found he did not contain the skills needed so that his mother would understand his decision. It was then, he picked up a book, fought his way through dyslexia and learned a few words to tell of his pain. He never finished the letter, the words he read started to change his image of himself, his feeling of worthlessness. Five years later he published his first book.

Jason Yurcic's poems are usually not written – instead they often float in the air around his children or glisten in the sunlight. A transitional poet, Yurcic's work fuels poems in adverse conditions. Those which make it to paper are a shaving compared to that which passes through his mind.

Two Poems: ‘upward class (im)mobility’, ‘first gen hurt’

Sarah Traphagen

upward class (im)mobility

on the clock with exquisite specificity
name tag faded, fingernails unclean, uniformed
crushed earth hydrated scent of celery woven in.
thirty-three years in the grocery store
invisible like the 6 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. shift
wages in minutes
felt hard across the threshold of our 900 square foot home
embrace not always returned (too worn out)
Daddy
‘get your education’
8:30 p.m. upright asleep last ounce of strength
for the next day put away – again and again
I listened.
went up, up, up
to the made-it class
no nitty-gritty-have-to work (only want-to work).
I cut celery now *in degrees*
but wear my father’s tired like a faded name tag
inside
labeled blue collar kid.

first gen hurt

student loan arithmetic defies mental math
$86, 824.13 + $33, 778.07 + $10, 972.39*
private undergrad tuition by mistake
end of semester account hold ritual
college bitch
books cost money (nobody told me)
calculated precisely, $30 will purchase two weeks of groceries
expert in food from the cart back onto the shelf
she won’t get in
graduate school armed with peanut butter and jelly sandwiches
one-handed drive from class to part-time shirt folding

Medicaid recipient: smile for your photograph
12% interest – this
or else.
vocabulary expansive / no longer understood
application fees add up to a better life
no test prep results in eight rejection letters
aren't you being a little ambitious?
doctorate in cognitive dissonance
will you marry me and my debt?
unentitled to the rise
you're the one with all the money
entitled to the guilt

still the answer.

**actual student loan amount accrued by author*

Author Bio

Sarah Traphagen is a first-generation college student and graduate. She received her B.A. in English from Niagara University, M.A. in English from the University at Buffalo, and Ph.D. in English from the University of Florida. She has taught at the University of Florida and two college preparatory schools, The Hockaday School and The Mountain School of Milton Academy. An award-winning educator, she now advances non-profit college access and educational equity initiatives for underprivileged students, mentors young people, and writes about the working-class first-gen college experience.

Three Poems: ‘Bright Day’, ‘Underworld’, ‘Rehabilitation’

Ian C Smith

Bright Day

Suffering sets him apart. He could be a movie character on a journey, a young Johnny Depp who has tasted the floor, authority’s boot in his face, brooding about money, fearing contact with his major problem, people, wanting neither crutches nor temptation. The thought of enclosure again tightens his muscles. He imagines being buried alive in a coffin, air thinning slowly. Making his way back to reality taking a deep breath he thinks of where rest might come this night, that slide into dreamless sleep, a fragrant woman whispering his name. He could shatter kissing a moist, pretty mouth.

This changing view, clattering soundtrack, reminds him of immersion in books, his mind’s voice urging him on like a sports coach. He memorises a hostel address, and where he can sell a street magazine, wants to save, reach a turn in his trail. He would burn bad luck, that circle of his hurt, doesn’t realise others sitting here speeding towards the magic city might also be troubled. Finger on thumb, he traces phrases, seductive sentences, thoughts, dreams of shaping this into print published on a crisp white page.

The walk from the station, the street’s jostle sliding towards him, artworks of advertising fizz, that skyline, sex, wealth, this extended view, rattles his heart; strangers touching, their laughter, frenzy of chatter. He wants to put his fingerprints on this panorama of pulsing late morning, has stopped thinking of what went wrong, that hole in time like an old photograph. On the footpath he claims a seat to absorb what he missed, a figure in a moving painting.
An emergency vehicle’s siren pierces him, some residual jungle trace readying him for flight or fight, basking over. He grips a plastic bag of pathetic possessions, recidivism a word beyond understanding. He has phone numbers, a parole officer, and the woman who works and waits like a heroine in a C&W song.

cinnamon, basil
choices preferable to
gentian, horehound.

Underworld

Our escape route led to a culvert system between school, railyards, and slouching town. A couple of teachers crossing the football ground separated, circling to trap us smoking in the scrub. Our hideaway resembled a birdwatcher’s blind I saw recently on my long, reflective wetlands walk. We watched their comical efforts at stealth, casually stubbed our ciggies, concealed the tobacco tin in its usual artful place, then descended into the underworld.

Along stormwater drains, cool on a hot day, about five feet in diameter, murky, lit by matches, distant openings, oily water inches deep at their centres, sometimes a bestiary of small drowned creatures, furred and winged, viscera we stepped over, stooped, pants tucked into socks, we waddled, our contagious echoes ringing with bravado, subterranean cartographers, or escaped convicts darkling through catacombs. That reek, squalid confinement, would churn me with claustrophobia now.

Emerging in our bayside terminal town we worked the usual shops; newsagents, or either of two rival stores where nothing cost over a quid, swift without seeming so, school squatting a phone call away, two distracting while another palmed preselected items for resale, marauders buzzing with adrenalin, glorying in peer status.

Heading for sandy tracks threading through tea-tree scrub behind the foreshore, we tried door handles of parked cars without shortening stride, cigarettes, change, disappearing from unlocked gloveboxes. Relying on luck, animal cunning, we lurched, maculate, towards early exits from an education as rank as those culverts into deadbolted work, domestic and other disasters, a gradual thinning of hope, yet I recall those times with an ambiguous wan fondness, this retrospection about squandering risk, the bluster of daring, blood's weight pumping through untried hearts.

Rehabilitation

Anger off my heel for now, a murderous taste, metallic, blood in my mouth, drizzle in the yard beyond this high window, an air-slit in pitted stone the colour of bruises housing rage, terror, disgrace; sloughed up, a bucket, mat, graffiti, muscles still trembling, flesh lacerated, survival is my sole aim. If my heart shrivels I shall become a chalked outline.

The boy prone on concrete, blood pooling around his head spreading ever wider filling cracks, alarmed me. Captain Armstrong, 'Snake', for his venomous glare, controlled this regime; straight backed, boxing gloves displayed in his office a sign of muscular Christianity, the firm instruction of young minds led astray.

The historic C19th prison, gutted of tears, fear, yet wreathed in desolation, was sold to developers. Before its makeover as townhouses it opened to the public. When I still searched for love, my then second wife, young sons, and I, joined tourists stickybeaking at forsaken souls' lives. Our guide, Jim Armstrong, flabby retired guard, hair, humour, thin, entertained us, a practised spiel, anecdotes about colourful inmates, reminding us to visit the souvenir shop when leaving.

Reaching the Young Offenders Group area I struggle, remembered sour taste in my mouth, disoriented, itching to break out from our polite, voyeuristic seminar, step into shadow, find a vestigial echo of the vanished tool shed where I witnessed in dread a pitchfork at a terrified boy's throat. For some, the spectral past is unreal, the present real; for me, vice versa.
Leaving, I needed to talk, explain, but bore it, bottled up as usual. I didn't tip Jim, this actor, our genial guide, wanted to step forward, expose obscenity, but held that to myself, too, our boys, a salvaged life, my focus. I bought a T-shirt instead, wore it, days softening into years, until, pocked with holes, it eventually fell away into my foul ragbag of reminiscence.

Author Bio

Ian C Smith writes in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria, and on Flinders Island. His work has appeared in *Antipodes*, *Communion*, *cordite*, *Eureka Street*, *Griffith Review*, *Journal of Working-Class Studies*, *Meniscus*, & *Shaping the Fractured Self* (UWAP). His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra Press.

Two Poems: ‘They called her a methhead’, Mining for Copper’

Jodie Childers, University of Massachusetts

They called her a methhead

but I’ll tell you what
that girl worked her ass off
down there at the Mini Mart
and I can attest to that

the coffee pot was always full
the nachos never ran out on her shift
one time
I kid you not
I saw her down on her hands and knees
scrubbing the tile floor
with a rag and a toothbrush

that woman could restock the cigarettes
while blindfolded

every morning
when I pulled into the parking lot
after my night shift
she’d have my Skoal and my paper
right on the counter
waiting for me

Now I don’t know exactly what happened
with her cash drawer
that’s between her
and the management
all I know is
I’ve been coming to this place for twenty years
and she was the only one
who ever knew my powerball numbers
by heart

I’ll never forget the last time I saw her
right before they let her go
four in the morning
no gloves
no coat

just knocking ice
off the awning with her
bare hands

the obit was just two lines
and it didn't say nothing about all that

Mining for Copper

Two miners dig through the trash
scavenging what's left of a dead town

Got to find something good tonight
electric bill overdue

Got to get something better
than cans and bottles,

a Barbie for the little one,
a lamp with a busted shade,

Got to get something good tonight.
The best stuff is always in front of the blue house,

the garbage truck in the distance,
He tosses aside a banana peel, some wet leaves,

the garbage truck in the distance,
throws the old Magnavox into the shopping cart.

They'll bust that sucker open tonight,
copper should be worth a few bucks at least.

A hand inside the blue house
lowers the blinds.

Author Bio

Jodie Childers is a writer and documentary filmmaker whose creative work explores the psychology of class hegemony. Her poetry has been published in the *Portland Review*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Feral Feminisms* and the volume A*ppalachian Reckoning: A Region Responds to Hillbilly Elegy*. She has also published articles on 20th century American political dissent and is currently completing a documentary feature about Pete Seeger's environmental legacy. Video work from this project has been featured in *The Woody Guthrie Annual* and *In These Times*.

Three Poems: ‘Charleena Chavon Lyles’, ‘Spotted Owl’, ‘Economics’

Jen Vernon, Sierra College

Abstract

This collection of poems is based in working-class life through an intersectional lens on the west coast of the US. It includes a documentary poem to a young Black woman, Charleena Chavon Lyles, who has been elegized by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in Seattle. It draws on news articles and an obituary to support its truth claims and aims to counter the official police report and support the global, working class, BLM movement. ‘Spotted Owl’ is a poem that talks back to the opposition between loggers and the forest, in part from the point of view of an old growth tree. It highlights the intimate relationship between trees and owls and between blue- collar workers who directly work with natural resources and the environment. ‘Economics’ is about work beyond capitalism, through a focus on the relationship between bees and a chaste tree and the Irish word for labor, saothar. In sum, these poems address the lived experience of class through the author’s vantage at this place and time, from the US west coast.

To access sound files for each poem, please click the poem titles.

Charleena Chavon Lyles (1987-2017)

lived from zero to thirty years old and had four children and a bean
in her tummy, a girl and a boy 12 and 11, a girl 4 and another boy 1,
expecting the next at 14 weeks gestated

she was from washington and lived lots in kent and seattle,
sometimes without a home with her brood to tend and defend
and her own self at 110 pounds and 5' 3 inches of formidable size

sometimes she wore yellow earrings and blouse by backyard roses
and smiled for the picture taker at barbecue, ate potato chips
and ribs and tropical punch, kids run plopping in blowup pool

she was a poet her obituary says, and survivor of personal
violence from former boyfriend father of youngest two, she
beseeched the state and police for protection she tried

the mental health court of the mind and they said they might
take her children away, in buried bureaucracy white paper
factory billowing sheets to foster care fathers seeking meat

feast paid stipend to eat, you *kkk devils*, she called cops,
there was a breach, I can shapeshift to she *wolf and so can my children*
we wish, tracers zinging off police as they enter and break

historical warbles of lynching and rape and stripping and take
howling with the moon at her back when nobody came human
to help her defend so she charged them with kitchen knife

and they shot her seven times, how dare she challenge
our cauc-assed statures in badges and boots
they asked with their eyes, and just like Custer they killed her

with the little ones near, saw the whole thing and heard it
still their reporting calls children in mother's blood
officially *unharmed*, just read the police report

credible news, incredible killings of Black beauties in sun
a golden one and her littles, we, american kin, reckon the sin
so the healing can begin

Spotted Owl

Wipe Your Ass with a Spotted Owl bumper stickers say
on log trucks burling down Yelm Highway,
strands of hairy bark bounce by on bodies
chained and girded to flatbed fierce,
heft padded by leather wrapped hands
crank pullied skin to skin jam,
torsos severed from roots and limbs
circles story years of life

and when you were alive like mountain
did a pair of eyes abysmal find a nook
like the crook between shoulder and neck
to paw and coo, did you shelter

owl mates, homebodies who batten down for life
return to one nest in one tree in one old growth forest
one wife one husband three sheep-looking children
meat-eaters quiet-types work nights

choker setter, you learned to do it young
set cables hard fast get back
in cedar breath and miles of cloud
back in living room, kids bickering
for who gets to pull boots off,
charcoaled x's to logging socks,
crisscrossed by cork and thread

and for dinner she makes you all biscuits and stew
your body twisted and wrung
she tenders and hugs you
like environmentalists trees do
home makes you right and before light
corrected and clean with thermos of black cream

there is paper there is dream
what we produce and what we cannot claim,
thick trees hung with mighty limbs
speak creaks to wind, never mind
banshee blister scream
or blade-line birds of prey on duty
you steady you sustain, cradling
babes in egg of spotted owl

economics

bear bees love to eat buds of violet chaste tree
they work from sun to sun, like human men
man works from sun to sun but a woman's work
a woman's work is never done

their black rotunds buzz and reverberate
waddling leaves and stalks of flower
don't mind the 108 degree heat
know how to get 'er done

and the queen, massive reproduction
so many pollen suckers necessary
and there is no temporary Labor Ready,
different kind of work between tree and bee

sensuous tie, communion with no big god
or corporation between them- a *saothar,*
an abundant work in which
the makers bear the fruits
and there is no stripping away
or depletion

even the hens in the morning want
to keep their small warm eggs
when they are not made a trade
like gold dust for berry

Author Bio

Jen Vernon is a poet, performance researcher, and community college professor where she teaches communication studies and journalism. She was awarded a 'Tillie Olsen' from the Working-Class Studies Association for her book *Rock Candy*, (West End press, 2009) in 2010. She lives with her little family in Folsom, California.

Thanks to Charles Callan of the Irish Labour History Society and their journal, *Saothar*

Poem: ‘Reflections from the Parking Lot’

L. Eva Wagner

Link to the poem via YouTube: https://youtu.be/fKi7EuH3G3I

Author Bio

L. Eva Wagner is a higher education facilities management consultant and adjunct professor of construction management at the University of Texas El Paso.

Smarsh, S. (2020) *She Come By it Natural: Dolly Parton and the Women Who Lived Her Songs*. Simon and Schuster.

Review by Pamela Fox

Country music star Dolly Parton has garnered mass attention since she lit out on a bus from her Appalachian home in 1964. But as Sarah Smarsh surmises in her new book, that spotlight frequently singled out this singer/songwriter/actress/business mogul for the 'wrong'—i.e. misogynist—reasons. *She Come By it Natural: Dolly Parton and the Women Who Lived Her Songs* finds a sweet spot between celebrity biographies and academic studies about this legendary performer by offering a distinct working-class feminist perspective gleaned from Smarsh's own experience within her rural female working-class family. Those familiar with Smarsh's best-selling book *Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth* will be pleased to get reacquainted with her mother and Grandma Betty, who lived the kind of lives that Parton knew intimately and ultimately shared with the world. This autobiographical component doesn't simply serve as a testament to Parton's devoted fan base; it accentuates a particular kind of gendered and classed knowledge that Smarsh finds all too lacking in elite spaces. Privileging working-class rural speech, she invites similar readers to enjoy being the central audience for her recuperation of all things Dolly. But make no mistake: she equally calls out the professional classes, as well as activists, on their class biases; their ignorance of working-class feminism; their dismissal of country music as politically retrograde; and their view of Parton as a contradictory, improbable feminist. Smarsh acknowledges that Dolly doesn't identify as such in name but argues that 'her work is a nod to women who can't afford to travel to the march, women working with their bodies while others are tweeting with their fingers' (p. xiii).

Originally published in 2017 as a four-part series of essays for the alternative country music journal *No Depression*, the book version expands the original temporal framework of Smarsh's study from the devastating 2016 Presidential election to the momentous 2020 contest. It may seem curious to cast an aging female country music icon, previously 'best known … as the punch line of a boob joke' (p. ix), as the healing unifier of our highly polarized political climate. But Smarsh has gotten our attention. In both election years, she claims, '[p]olitical headlines were fixating on a hateful, sexist version of rural, working-class America that I did not recognize. Dolly's music and life contained what I wanted to say about class, gender, and my female forebears: That country music by women was the formative feminist text of my life' (p. xii). Arguing that 'Parton was brilliant not just in songwriting and singing but in gender performance and business,' she lauds 21st-century fans for seeing what 'was there all along ... but for the blinders of patriarchy: Parton's artistry, intellectual depth and self-fashioned paradoxes that slyly comment on our country's long-denied caste system' (pp. x-xi).

She Comes By It Natural sets out to investigate this shift in Parton's reputation over the decades, grafting the history of the U.S. women's movement onto the coordinates of her life span. Smarsh begins with the state of women's oppression in 1946, the year of Dolly's birth, noting, '[w]omen in poverty and women of color fared the worst, on the losing end of societal structures favoring wealth and whiteness. Meanwhile, their contributions to women's progress went unnoticed, undocumented, and ill-understood' (p. x). Those offerings may have been

invisible to feminist historians of the movement because they appear so counterintuitive within mainstream spheres. In Dolly's case, she contested small town sexism with her own 'town tramp' image. Smarsh hails Parton's lifetime of work to revamp 'this frequently vilified class of American woman,' deeming it 'at once the greatest self-aware gender performance in modern history and a sincere expression of who Parton is. … the working-class woman whose feminine sexuality is often an essential device for survival and yet whose tough presence might be considered 'masculine'' (p. 6). The book rightly lingers on Dolly's early protean songwriting that documents the dangers for rural working-class women: violent men, neglected and shamed mothers and daughters, dying children. From the beginning, this talented young woman knew that she needed to leave her home in order to save herself and tell the world why. Smarsh counters 'intellectual knowledge' with Parton's 'experiential knowing' (p. 49), arguing, 'working-class women might not be fighting for a cause with words, time, and money they don't have, but they possess an unsurpassed wisdom about the way gender works in the world' (p. 49). She parallels Dolly's numerous escape acts throughout her career with those by women in her family and community: 'airplane factory workers, cafeteria cooks, discount-store cashiers, diner waitresses, fast-food workers—all contain a common thread of dramatic, self-preserving departures' (p. 55).

Yet Smarsh doesn't (entirely) gloss over the price Parton paid for her insistent autonomy. We learn that while in her thirties, she had a breakdown and became suicidal during another pivotal feminist moment, defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1982. After seeking help, Parton fired employees who failed to heed her authority, concentrated on her physical and mental health, and transformed her business plan. Having 'conquered a man's world the best a woman could and found it a place that would treat her like dirt even when she was on top,' she did the next best thing: she built 'her own damn world,' Dollywood, in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee (pp. 115-116). While clearly crafted to enhance her assets portfolio, Parton also designed her theme park to employ those without jobs in her home state (approximately 3,500) and to showcase its mountain culture. Smarsh acknowledges that skeptics could surmise some exploitation here but counters with Dolly's signature tactic of beating others to the punch: 'To fight the dehumanization of the rural poor, she got rich, went home, and turned Appalachia into a performance before rich, urban developers could' (p. 155). (However, a later dinner-theatre enterprise named Dixie Stampede disappoints the author for its 'white-washed nostalgia for the Antebellum South' (p. 159).)

In the final pages, Smarsh revels in Dolly's world-wide success but laments the stagnant gender politics that still govern country music radio, which typically airs on average seven out of sixty songs by women artists. She nods to '[t]oday's young female singer-songwriters who follow in Parton's footsteps—old twang, modern ideas, gothic country themes, spiritual vulnerability' who may be poised to take up her mantle (pp. 144-45). Citing a *Slate* media critic's comparison of Dolly to Nicki Minaj, Smarsh adds, 'Parton helped pioneer the sort of feminism on display in contemporary pop music--serving up T&A on your own terms, subverting objectification by having a damn good time with it—but perhaps not while speaking the same language as progressive America' (pp. 170-71). Earlier in the book, she insists that for poor and working-class women, 'the fight to merely survive is a declaration of equality that could be called 'feminist.' But here's the thing: … they don't give a shit what you *call* it' (p. 48, my emphasis). I concur. Yet I'm a bit uncomfortable with Smarsh's culminating veneration of this artist, whose 'place in culture finally shifts from objectified female body to the divine feminine—a sassy priestess in high heels' (p. 149). Maybe my academic knowledge is clashing with my 'experiential knowing' of working-class feminism, but I prefer to think of Dolly less as a deity and more as a grounded musical and narrative force who brings together a plethora

of races, genders, sexualities, leftists, conservatives. Nevertheless, I admire this book's all too rare space for poor and working-class women to idolize one of their own.

Reviewer Bio

Pamela Fox is Professor of English at Georgetown University, where she teaches classes on British and American working-class literature, environmental racial justice (Hurricane Katrina), and the cultural politics of motherhood. She is the author of two books, *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel*, and *Natural Acts: Gender, Race, and Rusticity in Country Music*, and co-editor of *Old Roots, New Routes: the Cultural Politics of Alt.Country Music.* She has written about transnational adoption, contemporary music memoir, and is beginning work on a digital humanities project, 'Reading Motherhood,' with her co-teacher and colleague Elizabeth Velez.

Smith, B.E. with photographs by Dotter, E. (2020, 1987). *Digging Our Own Graves: Coal Miners & the Struggle over Black Lung Disease* (updated edition). Haymarket Books.

Review by Janet Zandy

'Black Lung Blues'

> *I went to the doctor, couldn't hardly get my breath*
> *Went to the doctor, couldn't hardly get my breath*
> *The doctor said that you got something that well could mean your death.*[1]

'Black lung is a cruel disease, a humiliating disease. It's when you can't do what you like to do, that's humiliating,' says a miner disabled by black lung since the age of forty-eight (p. 168).

This is a story about the bodies of coal miners in relation to power and knowledge. It is a history of the contested definition of black lung disease (actually, a cluster of diseases), of the relationship between coal dust and the human respiratory system, of the necessity for collective action, and of the struggle of coal miners and their families for compensation and for the legitimacy of their own experiential knowledge. Barbara Ellen Smith began this work as a dissertation, published it first in 1987 with Temple University Press, and then, informed by the current surge in black lung disease, revised it in 2020 for Haymarket Books.

She skillfully traces the damage to the working body by interlinking class oppressions—corporate power, deliberate governmental suppression of unionization (particularly during the Reagan era), speed-up and mechanization, bureaucratic sludge, and faulty, even biased, scientific paradigms. There's institutionalized knowledge and there's lived, endured, bodily knowledge. Which side are you on?

The title is drawn from an old Hazel Dickens song about the metaphoric 'icy cold' hand of black lung reaching for a miner's life, cold like 'water hole in the dark cave.' Black lung turns miners into living ghosts of themselves, still alive, wearing—no matter how well scrubbed—the 'mascara of the mines,' that is, black coal dust clinging to eyelids and lashes (p. 41). Literally and metaphorically, they dig their own graves.

Smith places the upsurge in (preventable) black lung disease, especially as affecting miners at a younger age and in a more virulent form, in the context of a multilayered labor history situated in geographic and political economies. Mining, at any time, is dangerous work, and

[1] Words and music: Mike Paxton, Fayette Music Co., 1969, *Voices from the Mountains,* Collected and recorded by Guy and Candie Carawan, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982, 172.

increasingly hazardous with the proliferation of smaller non-union mines ('dogholes') and thin seam drilling through rock sandstone with high silica content (p. 13). A retired miner from southern West Virginia describes working in a doghole: *I worked at one [small, nonunion] mine. . . .They really had bad equipment, old equipment, trying to get by cheap as they can, mine coal and make money* (p.13).

Smith came of age as a labor historian and activist by going to West Virginia to work for the Black Lung Association in 1971-72. There she entered a world of long memories—of union battles, of ancestral labor in the mines and of danger and death. She describes this book as 'hybrid' (p. 3). It includes appendices and extensive notes, a history of the UMWA (United Mine Workers of America), especially under John Lewis, union calcification, rank and file insurrection, and the formation of the critically important, far reaching, Black Lung Association in 1969 after the November 20, 1968 mine explosion near Farmington, West Virginia which took the lives of seventy-eight miners. The Black Lung Association emerged initially out of regional organizing by both men and women, and in collaboration with a few and rare physicians. Powered by collective resistance through wildcat strikes and roving picket lines, it fueled the passage of the US Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969 (p. 152). However, as Smith acknowledges, reforms have implicit limitations, and legislators, lawyers, and doctors speak languages apart from 'the class-based discontent of workers' (p. 154).

Miners protest on the steps of US Capitol, Washington D.C., 1975. Photo by Earl Dotter

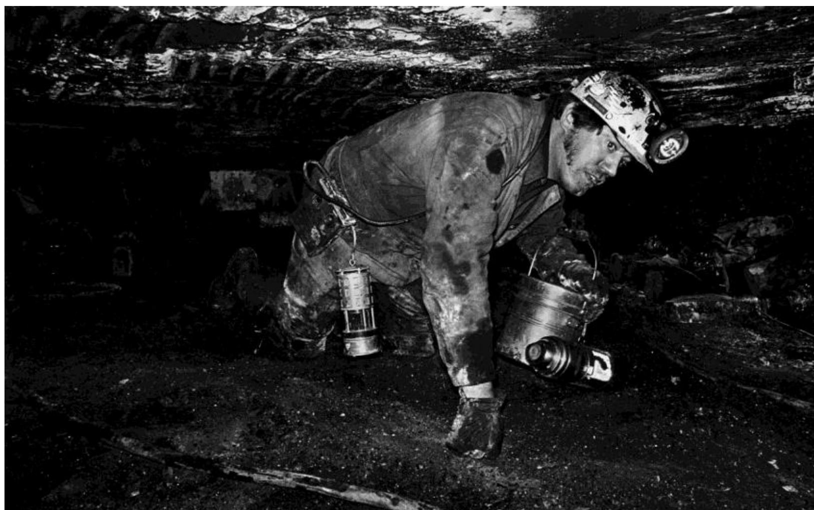
This is a medical history that emphatically names the workplace as the source of disease. How that workplace is seen, and through whose eyes, is integral to perceiving the intersection of knowledge and power. Central to Smith's study are the voices of miners and their families based on interviews she conducted in the 1980s and then more recently. Those voices bring the reader inside the mine, the family home, the doctor's examining room, the very bodies of miners as they struggle to catch a clear breath, and outside to protests and strikes and to the effect of unemployment on communal networks. Here's the voice of a Black miner from southern West Virginia:

> *I got laid off in '53, in November, during the Black exodus of the fifties. Everybody Black was getting cut off; it was straight out discrimination. Now, a lot of men had been cut off; many white men were cut off. But you take ten Blacks out of a community, you done stripped the whole community. I mean everyone.* (p. 67).

I wish she had space for more of those voices.

UMWA Local 6025 Safety Committee Members (left to right) Steve Shapiro and William Bennett with Jimmie Sword at Consolidation Coal's Bishop mine. Bishop, West Virginia, 1974. Photo by Earl Dotter

Smith does not flatten the story into winners and losers. She brings to the surface long-lived complex relationships among miners, unions, and operators. She acknowledges miners' desire to control their craft and work practices, their skepticism about legislative actions separate from miners' own knowledge, their disdain for 'long-haired theorists' (p. 50), their indignant conundrum in having to prove their own disease, as well as the legislative trap of shifting the conflict out of the workplace onto and within governmental bureaucracies (pp. 156-157). What is consistent is the essential contradiction between 'the necessity of earning a living wage and the need to protect themselves against dying in the effort' (p. 50).



(top) Fireboss performs pre-shift inspection in 30-inch coal seam; and (bottom) using pads on his hands and knees, the shot-firer pulls a wagonload of dynamite to the coal mine face to set the explosives. Logan County, West Virginia, 1976. Photos by Earl Dotter

Digging Our Own Graves embodies the problem of measurement. It is reminiscent of Stephen Jay Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981) and his critique of IQ tests and intelligence ranking systems. Who or what measures how much coal dust a miner can inhale and still survive? Smith recognizes the necessity of respecting and listening to workers themselves. This is the aspect of the book that is most relevant to working-class studies in a general sense. Is the emphasis on workers or on studies? How do you get the balance right?

Definitions of black lung disease are inseparable from the diagnoses of doctors and their reliance on technological tools. Smith is cautious about science denial,[2] but she has witnessed too much to separate the very defining of the disease (and consequential miners' compensation) from institutional and ideological structures of power and knowledge. The health or un-health of coal miners is inseparable from the long history of coal company doctors, from the application and reliance on X-rays for diagnosis, and for the intentional or unintentional complicity of physicians. Smith writes, 'this technological construction of disease led to a ludicrous and tragic situation throughout the coal fields: disabled miners battled for breath while physicians four hundred miles away viewed X-rays of their lungs and pronounced them free of occupational disease' (p. 168). A particularly egregious example is Dr. Paul Wheeler, a radiologist from Johns Hopkins Medical School, who read thousands of X-rays at the behest of coal companies contesting compensation claims. He concluded that scarring on miners' lungs had causations other than coal mining conditions. As a result, 'between 2000 and 2013, at least eight hundred miners were denied compensation' (p. 168). That is not the whole story, however. In the history of black lung disease there are heroic and pioneering physicians. Dr. Donald Rasmussen, for example, developed a method of identifying this complex disease (or complex of diseases) through other diagnostic tools such as blood gas analysis and the sick miners' diminished ability to oxygenate their own blood (pp. 38-39).

[2] See her dialogue with Chris Hamby, author of *Soul Full of Coal Dust: A Fight for Breath and Justice in Appalachia,* Boston: Little Brown, 2020: https://www.haymarketbooks.org/blogs/244-digging-our-own-graves-the-struggle-over-black-lung-disease-in-appalachia.

In light of the current pandemic, differences and assumptions about what defines safe and unsafe work are not so evident, if they ever were. This understanding is part of the interior landscape of Earl Dotter's body of work. His images continue a visual legacy of mines and miners from Lewis Hine's 'breaker boys' to Robert Frank's Welsh miners, to Milton Rogovin's photographs of miners internationally. No one, though, gets closer to the physicality of labor than Earl Dotter. In his 32-page picture section, placed in the near center of this 2020 edition, Dotter provides a visual chronicle to accompany Smith's history. Imagine where Earl Dotter had to position his own body in order to photograph miners extracting coal miles underground. Consider the human relationships Dotter established in order to photograph within impoverished communities. Coal miners and their families trusted Earl Dotter; it is an earned trust.[3]

It is unlikely that coal will be back, as promised.[4] What is clearly back, however, is the virulence of black lung disease. This is an essential book to understand that persistence and damage. I approach it from a position of not-knowing. True, I have meager memories of my parents shoveling coal into the cellar furnace below our four-room rented apartment in Union City, New Jersey. True, I traveled to the Black Country, Northwest of Birmingham, to have a simulated experience of going down into a mine, as well as a similar experience in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, where you could purchase a coal replica fashioned as a pin. But I do not know hazardous work first hand. I am convinced, though, that my father would have lived longer than 49 years if he had been a professor instead of a chemical worker in a pre-OSHA plant. Those memories shape my view of a Working-Class Studies grounded in an awareness of epistemological differences. Smith's last chapter is called 'Reckonings.' There is no ultimate settling of accounts, however, but there is a way of practicing Working-Class Studies as a series of reckonings, a sorting out, a recognition of the gaps between institutional knowledge and lived, embodied, knowing.

Reviewer Bio

Janet Zandy is a Rochester Institute of Technology emerita professor. She is the author of the award winning *Hands: Physical Labor, Class and Culture* and other books on the working classes and culture. Her most recent book is *Unfinished Stories: The Narrative Photography of Hansel Mieth and Marion Palfi,* researched at the Center for Creative Photography, as an Ansel Adams Fellow. She was general editor of *Women's Studies Quarterly,* 1997-2001. She can be reached at janetzandy52@gmail.com.

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[3] See Earl Dotter, *The Quiet Sickness: A Photographic Chronicle of Hazardous Work in America,* Fairfax, Virginia: American Industrial Hygiene Association, 1998 and *Life's Work: A 50 Year Photographic Chronicle of Working in the U.S. A.,* Falls Church, Virginia: American Industrial Hygiene Association, 2018.

[4] Eric Lipton, ''The Coal Industry is Back,' Trump Proclaimed. It Wasn't,' *New York Times,* October 6, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/05/us/politics/trump-coal-industry.html

Manno, A. (2020) *Toxic Masculinity, Casino Capitalism, and America's Favorite Card Game: The Poker Mindset.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Review by James V. Catano

Andrew Manno's *Toxic Masculinity, Casino Capitalism, and America's Favorite Card Game: The Poker Mindset* performs a number of very important functions. It offers a solid overview of broad aspects of traditional masculinity. It ties these issues to neoliberalism and its underlying encouragement of forms of social behavior. It aligns both of these concepts with a popular analogy linking current capitalist practice with casino play. For those interested in class analysis and masculinist cultural behavior, these are important topics.

In taking up those topics, the book provides an interesting and useful exemplification of both areas by looking at and within the coda of its title: game and gaming behaviors within Poker, aka 'The Poker Mindset' (PM hereafter). Among the concepts comprising the rhetoric of this gendered behavioral set are: Risk and Excitement; Competitiveness; and Courage, Toughness, and Aggressiveness.

After establishing these illustrative components within the first chapter, *Toxic Masculinity* moves on to an ensuing series of analogies and brief case studies that are of interest to any reader attempting to sort through the threads that make up the intertwined and intersecting threads of contemporary masculine culture, toxic and otherwise. The result is a wide-ranging body of materials including the Alt-Right, media production techniques, the rise of the precariat, populist anger, Martin Shkreli, misogyny in poker, the Men's Rights movement, poker tournaments, Elliott Rodgers and other mass-murderers, masculine pick-up techniques, Incels, and related topics.

Ranging widely about these materials is a large undertaking, of course, and it requires a certain degree of pruning to remove stray parts from each example that might drift outside of the boundaries set up as PM. Perhaps as a result of that need, *Toxic Masculinity* does have something of a tendency to drift from the part to the whole or, said another way, to substitute the example for the rule. Throughout the book, there is a proclivity to claim a large and all-encompassing role for the book's Poker Mindset.

The Poker Mindset is an ideology, a set of taken-for-granted values that are deeply embedded in American ideas of masculinity and economic success. As with any ideology, these values are perpetuated through cultural training by families, education, religion, politics, and business, just to name a few (p. 47).

But what makes the Poker Mindset—which draws upon and exemplifies the attributes and behaviors in traditional masculinity as noted above—an ideology unto itself and one which

ostensibly encompasses traditional and toxic masculinity? It is most certainly a useful discussion via analogy, and one which serves to enable general illustrations of masculinism, although such illustrations may fall a bit short of rigorous theoretical description.

A quick example might be found in Chapter 6, ''Fight, Don't Fold': The Poker Mindset and the Rise of Trumpism.' As we are seeing on a daily basis, the ongoing denial by Trump of his loss to Joe Biden certainly enacts (along with splendid examples of his and his bit-players' buffoonery) the bluffing (lying), risk-taking (albeit within the classic sense of entitlement of the certain winner in which there is no risk at all), aggression, winner-take-all mentality that are seen as a part of the Poker Mindset. The question is what such a label provides. PM is certainly a quick and useful thumbnail sketch of Trump. But does it tell us as much as a clinical description of his behavior as 'pathological narcissism and antisocial personality disorder'?

To be sure, not everyone wants to consider the psychological underpinnings of toxic masculinity. But a reader might feel that there is some loss in the tendency to substitute the Poker Mindset of the book's subtitle for the whole behavioral field of masculinity and men's studies. It is a drift that appears in the two-sentence shift of the following, which appears several sentences after the above:

> [T]he perfect neoliberal subject embodies traditional masculinity in its expressions of toughness, independence, and aggression. In such a competitive world, success is always possible for those who are seen as deserving by having embraced the values of the Poker Mindset (p. 47).

It may be an unfair overreading to see this slippage as a problem in an overall study attempting to situate where Poker fits into the larger arena of masculinity and its study. All that is required from a reader is to regularly engage in a mental correction of statements so that they are read as follows: 'In particular, this chapter will examine how the hypermasculine ideology [*exemplified by*] of the Poker Mindset reveals why the Alt-Right is on the rise' (my italics and deletion, p. 48).

But such rewriting might also require noting that the Poker Mindset does not occupy a more commanding role in masculinity than, say 'the Football Mindset' or 'the Boxing Mindset' or 'the Apprentice Mindset.' In fact, such a shift could prove highly useful, allowing for nuanced study of masculinity and the 'Poker Mindset' itself. For example, in considering a hypothetical Football Mindset, it might be possible to talk about how this particular game demonstrates an intensified enactment of 'toughness and aggression' while its nature as a team sport somewhat reduces the emphasis on 'independence.'

Working with such nuances and contradictions is precisely how ideologies work, of course, as they shapeshift and morph large components of masculinity into particular examples, thus ensuring a wide range of applicability within masculine roles while never quite appearing as the perfect enactment of any one form or one analogy. We see such internal ideological conflict in the classic recruitment rhetoric of the US Army, which encourages the possible inductee to 'Be All You Can Be,' even as a key aspect of bootcamp will be the breaking down and replacement of individualism with the overarching identity of the team or squad.

Such a reading could also serve to mitigate claims that 'It's only by thinking about the ideology of the Poker Mindset—which represents damaging ideas about the roles of men and women, what men are entitled to, and how to achieve success in our neoliberal economy and at what cost—that we can identify ways to combat these ideas on a systemic level' (p. 48). Such overstatement as this risks damaging the book's attempted linkage of attitudes toward poker and toxic masculinity writ large. Surely the Poker Mindset is, as the section's title states, 'A Way' to study masculinity and not, as this sentence seems to imply, the 'only' way?

Refining the discussion along these lines would have a variety of benefits and avoid a process in which the Poker Mindset comes close to being a foundational concept in the production of masculinity. Indeed, the book's introduction rightly notes the situation directly when it defines the Poker Mindset as 'a set of values seen outside the poker table' (p. vii).

The bottom line for the reader is relatively straightforward: if the generalizations to be found in the concept of the Poker Mindset have sufficient descriptive power to elevate them beyond other descriptive approaches, then there is no slippage here and PM is a singularly useful tool for characterizing the wide range of behaviors it notes. If that descriptive power is not there, then the Poker Mindset is not as wide-ranging and elegant as it needs to be to replace other related approaches. Either way, this book contains many useful discussions of its topic materials, and one whose reading will clarify the immense complexity of toxic masculinity and its role in current culture. It does so, moreover, with a wide array of examples, allusions, and references to behaviors and beliefs of particular interest to those concerned with issues of class-inflected identities.

Reviewer Bio

James V. Catano is producer/director of *An Enduring Legacy: Louisiana's Croatian-Americans*, author of *Ragged Dicks: Masculinity, Steel, and the Rhetoric of the Self-Made Man*, and co-editor with Daniel Novak of *Masculinity Lessons: Rethinking Men's and Women's Studies*. He holds a dual appointment as Professor of English Emeritus, and Professor Screen Arts Emeritus at Louisiana State University.

Streib, J. (2020). *Privilege Lost: Who Leaves the Upper Middle Class and How they Fall.* Oxford University Press.

Review by Sherry Linkon

Working-Class Studies aims to deepen and expand understanding of working-class life, but our work has both benefitted from and contributed to theory and research about how class works – how to define it, what shapes it, how it affects people's lives, and so on. This makes Jessi Streib's new book valuable even for those who might think of the professional middle class as the bosses who try to control and exploit workers, the clueless pundits or academics who dismiss working-class voters as racist idiots, or just snobs who look down on 'us.' However, as *Privilege Lost* reminds us, stories about professional middle-class lives offer useful lessons about how class works. Those stories also challenge some common stereotypes.

One of the most common stereotypes is that upper-middle-class people 'had everything handed to them on a silver platter.' *Privilege Lost* argues that this is not true for many children growing up in well-off professional families. Indeed, Streib argues, many become downwardly mobile as adults, in part because their parents did not pass on their economic, academic, or cultural resources. For some, the resources are uneven. They may have significant academic and institutional knowledge but relatively low incomes. In other families, parents have all three resources but spend so much time at work that they don't pass them along to their children, and in some cases, children reject the resources their parents have to offer.

At the same time, Streib shows, maintaining class position is not just a matter of whether young people are handed 'everything.' Their life paths are also shaped by what they do with the resources available to them. She describes how half a dozen identities influence young people's choices, ranging from stay-at-home mom to explorer. These identities reflect multiple factors, including individuals' interests and abilities, the values and patterns of their communities, and their response to their parents' resources. Someone who identifies as an athlete might pursue a path that leads away from professional work, while a self-identified family man might prioritize relationships over academics at school.

Streib suggests that people form identities in response to the resources available to them, though in some cases, individuals seem to reject available resources because of their identities. For example, she writes that, for rebels, 'receiving or accepting little academic and institutional knowledge and then displaying an identity that celebrated not having it was a recipe for downward mobility' (p. 65). While the causal relationship may not always be so clear, Streib argues that resources and identities together explain why many lose their upper-middle-class status. As she puts it, 'Their resources poised them for a fall, and their identities pushed them over the cliff' (p. 58).

Beyond her explanations of downward mobility, Streib's analysis, based on interviews with over 100 white people born into upper-middle-class families between 1984 and 1990 as part of the National Study of Youth and Religion, offers some useful insights for Working-Class Studies. Streib reinforces our understanding that class is not homogeneous, though instead of focusing, as we often do, on differences of time, place, or intersectional identities, Streib reminds us that even within a class category, we will find differences of economics, experience, and attitudes. Many of those differences reflect individual circumstances. Without in any way discounting the significance of class as a social category, *Privilege Lost* reminds us that even as we identify patterns that differentiate the working class from the middle class, as scholars like Barbara Jensen and Jack Metzgar have done, we should not ignore the power of individual circumstances and choices.

Streib's discussions of class problematize the idea of defining clear class categories, though that does not seem to be her intention. She does not present a class schema or even a well-developed model of what defines class categories. Rather, she focuses on people she describes as 'upper-middle-class,' offering a fairly minimal definition: families with at least one parent with a college degree and a professional job. That includes a wide range of people, from school librarians and social workers to business executives and academics. Some earn six-figure incomes, but others hold positions that require advanced degrees and offer status but not high pay. In many of these households, one parent does not work, holds a more working-class position, or is employed only intermittently. To call all of them 'upper-middle-class' ignores some important differences, and it makes clear that class is not homogeneous. Downward mobility does not land these young people in a uniformly working-class position, either. Some barely scrape by, but most have college degrees and some have jobs that do not pay well but require some specialization and training. How do we assign a class position to a 28-year-old who may simply not yet have found her path?

Streib's analysis also challenges the idea that middle-class culture prioritizes individual achievement (becoming) rather than connections to others (belonging).[37] Streib's analysis does emphasize individualism, but it is not always wedded to the pursuit of achievement, by young adults or their parents. *Privilege Lost* presents family after family where parents seem to have largely ignored their children. Sometimes, such neglect comes from parents' investment in their own careers, but not always. In examining the family cultures of those she dubs 'rebels,' Streib describes upper-middle-class parents who make almost no effort to cultivate their children's academic or other abilities. As one young man explains, his parents 'trusted me to live my own life and make my own decisions' (p. 58). At the same time, her discussions of those who identify as stay-at-home moms and family men suggest that they prioritize family over individual achievement, an ethos that seems to emphasize belonging. To be clear, Streib does not set out to critique the model mapped out by these Working-Class Studies scholars, but her analysis does complicate our thinking about how class works and offers a model for studying variations within classes.

[37] These are among the terms Barbara Jensen and Jack Metzgar have suggested to denote the distinct cultures of the working and middle classes. See Jensen's *Reading Classes: On Culture and Classism in America* (ILR Press, 2012) and Metzgar's 'Politics and the American Class Vernacular,' in *New Working-Class Studies,* edited by John Russo and Sherry Lee Linkon (ILR Press, 2005), pp. 189-208.

Privilege Lost is clearly written and packed with brief stories, but some of its nuances may get lost in a repetitive structure, as each chapter traces each participant through several set aspects of their lives. This stems, I think, from the challenge of a project based on a large corpus of interviews conducted by others for a study that is not about class. In trying to manage that data and maintain the focus of her study, Streib sometimes has to ignore potentially interesting detours and leave some questions unanswered. She notes some in her concluding chapters, such as the role of other kinds of parental resources, like wealth and social networks, and the trajectories of siblings. The humanist in me wanted fuller stories, with more consideration of complicating factors like how participants were influenced by their friends or their academic abilities.

Looking beyond the family, I also would have appreciated fuller discussions of how people's class paths were influenced by economic and social changes outside of their immediate circumstances. Streib discusses some of what she terms 'generational changes,' including changing roles for women and the decline in the number and quality of professional jobs. In part, this may reflect Streib's reliance on Pierre Bourdieu's ideas about habitus, which leads her to ignore issues of social conflict or power.

I can imagine another reading of these interviews that would pay more attention to how they reflected the broader social context – but that would be a different project. It is a testament to the value of Streib's work that, while it left me hungry to hear the rest of these young people's stories, it also got me thinking about different ways of approaching class.

Reviewer Bio

Sherry Lee Linkon is a Professor of English and American Studies at Georgetown University and the author of several books, including *The Half-Life of Deindustrialization: Working-Class Writing about Economic Restructuring* (Michigan 2018). She served for 17 years as co-director of the Center for Working-Class Studies and was the founding president of the Working-Class Studies Association.

Brim, M. (2020). *Poor Queer Studies: Confronting Elitism in the University*. Duke University Press.

Review by Renny Christopher

The introduction of this essential new study of elitism in the U.S. university system is called 'Queer Dinners,' which, among other things, describes Brim's night students at the College of Staten Island getting their candy bar-and-chips dinners out of a half-empty vending machine. They eat in a decrepit classroom where Brim's attempts to get to the intellectual work of the class are thwarted by video projectors that don't work. Hallways flooded by broken pipes, no heat—these very real material conditions symbolize the distance between the rich, elite institutions where Queer Studies has been shaped and the poorly-funded public institutions that educate more than three-quarters of all students in higher education in the 21st century. Or, as Brim puts it, 'the physical plant shapes how we're queer here' (p. 89). My experience of reading this book is, oh, yeah, I've eaten those dinners, I know their taste, the residue on my fingers and tongue…. I've taught in that same classroom, on the other side of the continent, at a rural California State University campus where I was allowed to develop an intro to LGBTQ studies course in the 1990s, but was warned that if I tried to offer it, it would never draw enough students and would be cancelled. It filled. And had a waiting list. And my students brought their vending-machine dinners to class with them. I imagine many readers of the *Journal of Working-Class Studies* have eaten those dinners as students and/or teachers in the classrooms of our (monetarily) poor institutions.

I think I've been waiting for this book since the day back in the 1990s when I sat in a session at the Modern Language Association meeting and heard Stanford English professor Marjorie Perloff say that we should return to teaching formal analysis of poetics because 'our students are hungry for it.' My jaw dropped on hearing that, because my students were just plain hungry and trying to get a degree that would get them a job that would feed them and theirs. Brim takes his experience teaching (literally) hungry students and uses it to question and re-think not only the field of queer studies from a poor/working-class perspective, but to question the very ways that the system of higher education in the U.S is arrayed not to dismantle, subvert, or ameliorate the class system, but to keep students sorted along class lines. About the field of higher education Brim writes: 'It is difficult to find an institution in the United States that sorts people by socioeconomic class as effectively as higher education; even as the university simultaneously proclaims and often fulfills its democratizing promise' (p. 4).

Brim's primary focus is on the ways that Queer Studies has developed (in terms of scholarship and pedagogy) almost exclusively in high-prestige, highly-selective institutions, and is therefore an exclusionary—and incomplete—field. He notes how Queer Studies positions itself against the grain, but if democratization is its goal then it has failed, in part because class as a category of analysis has not been part of Queer Studies. This book is what he calls a methodological intervention, seeking to create a field of Poor Queer Studies, based in black queer literacy, which comes out of poor institutions such as the College of Staten Island. He seeks 'to articulate the

background logic for why and how one can and cannot write a book about Queer Studies from poor and working-class two-year and nonselective four-year institutions' (p. 33). To do so he writes about his experiences of teaching Queer Studies to queer and non-queer students, the majority of whom are working-class students of color. Incorporating teaching into theory-making is something we talk about a lot, but rarely do. I thought his chapter called 'Poor Queer Studies Mothers' was going to be about the foremothers he was calling upon for his theoretical foundations. I was delighted to find that the chapter is actually about his students who are literally mothers, including those who have to bring kids to class when their childcare arrangements fall through. Here's one particularly great example of how out of touch academic theory is with who our students are (because it is primarily produced in rich institutions): some women 'enroll in Poor Queer Studies classes in order to be better mothers to their queer and not-queer kids, or to better perform their duties at their low-paying community outreach jobs. Yet, impossibly, Queer Studies manages to talk about a divide between town and gown, ivory tower and real world, queer theory and lived experience' (pp. 138-9). This passage exemplifies one of the things about this book that speaks to me most strongly in our current moment—this is a compassionate book, a book written by someone who possesses enough humility to learn from his poor and working-class students, particularly those of color, and to put that learning at the center of a book that is ironically—as he points out himself—published by a high-end university press.

He raises questions that are really unraisable in a rich queer studies context in 'high-end' higher education institutions: 'What would it look like and what would it mean to intentionally teach Queer Studies to working-class students?' (p. 101); how 'might Queer Studies help students in the workplace' (p. 102) and why 'should Queer Studies be considered an applied field of study?' (p. 106). These questions are mind-blowing because they're so far outside the norms of the field of Queer Studies (or, for that matter, Working-Class Studies). Brim creates intersections by taking antipodal ideas and knocking them together, forcing thought bubbles to pop out of the collisions. He offers a provocative, practical, and inspiring (modeling myself on Brim, I am linking disparate or even antithetical terms) list of examples of what he (revolutionarily) calls 'vocational Queer Studies' which ends with 'the queerest question of all: What makes work straight?' (p. 107). That's a question I've thought a lot about, but never named in those terms; I appreciate his formulation of it.

Brim calls for something that has been much on my mind for the past several years. We need to stop thinking of higher education as being personified by the ivy plus tier, which represents a tiny fraction of the students in higher education today, and yet takes up nearly all the news coverage devoted to higher education. One of my colleagues told me recently about talking with a NYT reporter, trying to get the reporter to feature universities that educate the new majority, and the reporter said the Times covers elite universities because that's where their readers went. As Brim puts it, we 'can't stop looking at high-end education' (p. 148), even though poor schools might actually do some things better, which is, as he notes, a practically inconceivable idea (p. 93). (Those of us who have spent careers in poor schools might already know this.) His incisive critique of free college proposals in our 'steeply tiered' educational landscape is sobering, as is his question of 'why isn't the call among progressives, including queer progressive intellectuals, for equal public education for all?' (p. 197). Why, indeed.

This book is important in multiple contexts—in Queer Studies, in working-class studies, and in the field of higher education looking at itself. One of the crucial parts of the book is that it insists on making race central to looking at all of the above, from noting the material absence of black male student bodies (p. 6), to proposing black queer remedial reading as a GE requirement, because, as he points out, no institution teaches black queer literacy; he calls it a cross-class, cross-status, cross-institution, cross-race problem. The book's final chapter centers both on a reading of John Keene's *Counternarratives* and on his students' experiences of learning to read it. Brim says that this text 'teaches us to read fiction that does not depend narratologically on the underlying storytelling principles of anti-blackness and anti-queerness' (p. 169-70). Just so, Brim's text shows us a Queer Studies discipline—and a University—which does not depend on the underlying principles of anti-working-classness. So, how do those of us who have eaten the poor queer dinners get those who are eating banquets in rich institutions to read the book?

Reviewer Bio

Renny Christopher is Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs at Washington State University Vancouver. *A Carpenter's Daughter: A Working-Class Woman in Higher Education* (Sense Publishers, 2009), addresses xyr experiences as the first in xyr family to attend college. Before earning a doctorate, Christopher worked as a printing press operator, typesetter, carpenter and horse wrangler.

Kirshner, J.A. (2019). *Broke: Hardship and Resilience in a City of Broken Promises*. St. Martin's Press.

Review by John P. Beck

Jodie Adams Kirshner teaches bankruptcy law at Columbia University. In 2016, she turned her attention to Detroit, the site of the largest municipal bankruptcy in the nation's history. Kirshner decided to move beyond recounting the simple mechanics of bankruptcy to look instead at the political, economic and social forces which formed the context for the bankruptcy decision and its aftermath. Kirshner conducted over 200 interviews with city residents to focus her exploration on the issues of day-to-day living in Detroit before, during, and after the declaration of bankruptcy. Bankruptcy has been used as a valuable tool for regaining solvency in some municipalities who faced natural disasters, for example, but Kirshner believes that the design and scale of Detroit's bankruptcy could not address the enormity of the problems the city faced, which were outside of its control. True control resided instead in the hands of state and national governments. The Detroit bankruptcy was triggered by the use of a state-appointed 'emergency manager,' working outside the bounds of elected city leaders to force change on the city. It was no accident that the school systems and local governments put under this form of state control in Michigan were all primarily African-American communities. Crippling costs were blamed on city residents in Detroit, though other communities in Southeastern Michigan refused to acknowledge the regionalism from which they were net gainers and Detroit net losers. As housing values dropped in Detroit, the city's tax base shrunk, leading to a cash-strapped city with nearly 150 square miles within which to provide police and fire, lighting and water, trash removal, and parks.

Kirshner uses the lives of seven Detroiters – Miles, Charles, Robin, Reggie, Cindy, Joe, and Lola (five men, two women, four Blacks, three whites) – to tell the broader, multi-faceted story of the city and the broken system all seven navigate to simply survive. All four of the African-Americans are in precarious employment. Their jobs are made even more precarious by a lack of dependable transportation – either public transportation, which was purposefully stopped from giving urban Blacks access to the suburbs where many work, or private vehicles which are subject to the highest insurance costs in the state. Both white men have come to Michigan because they perceive Detroit as a place where they can build an economic future involving real estate development.

The key common factor in all seven people's stories in *Broke* is real estate. Houses and land sit at the intersection of investment, taxation, neighborhood blight, and the aspiration to have a secure home. Declining housing costs and foreclosures fueled speculation and quick-buck investment by the haves and neighborhood degradation and uncertainty for the have nots. When homes that they had lost in foreclosure came up for auction, many Black Detroiters were locked out of the opportunity to own because the home values were too low for loan financing, but prices were still too high to buy with limited cash. Some homeowners turned to land contract arrangements, but ultimately lost their homes when predatory sellers had not disclosed (because they were not legally required to do so) that local taxes and fees were not being paid properly by the seller. When any

of the Black Detroiters in *Broke* seem poised to move forward, they were dragged down by costs beyond their means, which forced them to confront the realization that their dream of home ownership may exceed their grasp. As William, Reggie's cousin, stated about adversity, 'We don't cry, we just move on.'

The Detroit of *Broke* is not only a community of have nots, but of haves as well. Detroit has enclaves of success and development. It is the Detroit of Quicken Loan's Dan Gilbert, Midtown; the renamed Cass Corridor, and the phoenix-like rebirth of the Art Deco Detroit train station into Ford Motor's new center for the 21st century rise of mobility. Some of the book's subjects live in neighborhoods that are slated to be the next comeback success stories.

Kirshner has succeeded in showing how state politics, regional tensions, taxation and insurance inequities, the criminal 'justice' system, and systemic racism have ensured that the poor, primarily African-American, residents of Detroit seemingly can never get a break from being knocked down again and again. One of the strongest recurring themes in the book has to do with the ways in which traffic citations and court fees were added to Detroit residents' tax bills, which then led to tax-based foreclosure and home loss. Even the smallest fees and costs mount up to become insurmountable for the poor. The inability to pay bail when jailed, for example, can lead to missing work, which means less money to cover costs and the spiral continues.

Kirshner has juxtaposed three uses of the word 'broke' in this book. First and foremost, she is using the word to denote the economic hardships of the City of Detroit, an economic condition made worse and not better by governmental action. The second meaning of 'broke' has to do with her notion that the failures of government led to broken promises to Detroit and its residents (and in some cases from Detroit to its residents). The third use is evident in her story of these seven men and women in Detroit who 'hope for better days,' as she says in the title of her epilogue. That hope is part of the resilience captured in her sub-title and in the stories of the seven Detroiters.

There are other meanings of 'broke' that may be appropriate to consider when reading Kirshner's book. First, I think that you cannot read this book and not see the trauma that these four African-American men and women endure. Yes, they are resilient, but the compound inequities and indignities they face are real and traumatic. Second, the systems that should support Detroit and its residents are truly broken. It is now a daunting challenge, for example, as vast areas of Detroit must be lit when only a handful of houses on any street are occupied. This is not to say that services should be stopped, but great creativity and resolve must be brought to bear on the problems of Detroit; solutions for Detroit can inform decision-making across the wider world. A proper taxation system for Detroit which pulls in regional cooperation, an end to faulty development through tax breaks, and real State of Michigan responsibility are logical places to start.

The degradation of Black working-class Detroit, like its neighbor Flint an hour north, was not done overnight, nor was it accidental. Black lives matter every day, not only because of senseless police slayings of individuals, but because of the wholesale betrayal of Black working-class communities like Detroit. The resilience of these Detroiters should not be mistaken for acceptance or resignation.

Broke is an important book. Kirshner brings her knowledge of bankruptcy to the case of Detroit and does a good job of exploring larger economic and social trends through the lives of her seven subjects. Kirshner has added nicely to the literature of Detroit which aims to overcome a vision of the Motor City as simply a post-industrial wasteland.

Reviewer Bio

John P. Beck teaches in the Labor Education Program at Michigan State University. For nearly thirty years, he has co-directed Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives, a program on workers culture at MSU. In 2014, he co-edited *Detroit Resurgent*, a book profiling individuals attempting to reinvent the Motor City.

Winslow, C. (2020). *Radical Seattle: The General Strike of 1919.* New York University Press.

Review by Michelle Chen

Since the Covid-19 pandemic pummeled the economy, millions of workers have been displaced, while others continue to work amid increasingly harsh, often hazardous working conditions. With Covid forcing millions to choose between a paycheck and their health, some labor activists have hoped for a wave of wildcat strikes, and in the wake of the election, perhaps even a 'general strike' if Trump refused to concede.

There have been sparks of resistance, including spontaneous protests and walkouts, led by exhausted workers demanding fair wages and minimal safety protections at work.

Yet despite sporadic strikes, we are not quite seeing a massive labor insurgency, much less a general strike—not least because of constraints of the law and the unwillingness of mainstream unions to prioritize mass action over election campaigns and member services. Still, in a year of unprecedented calamity, the political moment seems ripe for some kind of grassroots uprising, as several generations have passed since organized labor disrupted the economy on a mass scale.

In 1919, in the midst of an even worse flu pandemic, workers in Seattle shut down their city, and ran it for five days. In *Radical Seattle: The General Strike of 1919*, Cal Winslow depicts an event that embodied the radical imagination of the Pacific Northwest at a moment of revolution and global turmoil—a moment that may resonate with workers' anxiety and outrage today.

The country's first full-fledged general strike, Winslow writes, began as a campaign of solidarity with the city's shipyard workers, who were embroiled in a labor standoff over wages, but it also reflected the evolution of class formation in a multiethnic, cosmopolitan city with a libertarian streak.

Winslow lays out the history of Seattle in the years leading up to the strike— its origins in settler colonialism and the distinct identity it forged as a maritime city at the far-west edge of America's growing empire. By 1919, in the wake of World War I, the city's atmosphere was charged with currents of anger and violence unfolding across the country. Race riots and food riots had erupted in cities. The flu pandemic of 1919 had ravaged working-class communities. As workers were being slaughtered in the war—which Seattle's branch of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) had opposed—thousands of strikes erupted nationwide, and in Seattle, some were led by the militant Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 inspired Seattle's radicals—a network of socialists and union organizers—to envision their city as the vanguard of the American labor movement.

Though the shipyard workers' campaign was mostly about fair wages, the call for a solidarity strike across the city represented a fundamental tension in the labor movement between the craft and industrial unions, as groups like the IWW believed in organizing 'one big union' across traditional occupational lines.

But in Seattle, the vision of organizing across occupational lines prevailed even among AFL members. Representing 110 local AFL-affiliates, the Central Labor Council, helmed by a Sunday school teacher and IWW sympathizer James Duncan, bucked the national leadership and championed a broad-based industrial rank-and-file movement, and by extension, sympathy strikes that symbolically and materially linked all workers' struggles.

The Russian Revolution also informed the culture of Seattle's labor movement. 'Seattle's workers saw peasants seizing land, soldiers marching away from the trenches, marching home,' Winslow writes. 'They saw people fighting for freedom and welcomed them.'

Tens of thousands of workers participated in the general strike, with a core of about 45,000 shipyard workers in Seattle and Tacoma, buttressed by unanimous or near-unanimous strike votes from the local unions, from miners to musicians. For a few days in February workers ruled the city.

The shutdown of the city's economy did not, as critics had speculated, trigger a social unraveling. In fact, the leaders of the strike strove to maintain social order after the local economy ground to a halt. Although 'the employers and the press clamored for blood,' Winslow writes, the strikers understood the potent symbolism of peace in a city whose inhabitants had been rocked by global and communal conflict: 'There was indeed virtually no violence, and that is what the strikers wanted, which is perplexing only if radicalism is associated with violence.'

The leaders of the strike also took pains to maintain vital public services: the welfare committee managed basic sanitation, ensuring that garbage pick-up continued under a designated trash collection crew; they kept firefighters on the job; established the 'Labor Guards,' comprised of union officers and veterans, to carry out public-safety patrols; and maintained critical infrastructure like telephone wires and electricity supply. While a hush settled over the streets, workers' lives continued in an autonomous collective social sphere. Union members ran 'strike kitchens' that ensured no one in the city went hungry, churning out tens of thousands of meals, with the help of hundreds of volunteers. Women workers, such as the hotel maids and laundry workers, mobilized and volunteered alongside the men.

The spirit of solidarity even managed to puncture the city's deep racial divides, as the strike was embraced by the city's Japanese immigrant workers, who were at that time besieged by growing anti-Asian hostility across the West.

And then, almost as suddenly as it had emerged, the strike evaporated. It did not end with a federal crackdown, as later strikes would; nor did it collapse from internecine conflict, as opponents probably hoped it would. According to Winslow, the general strike dissolved amid a combination of media attacks, threats of martial law from the mayor, and intervention from AFL higher-ups who were alarmed at Seattle CLC's going rogue.

Winslow's conclusion on what to make of the strike seems deliberately vague. Primarily his work is a counterpoint to the media narrative that the strike was somehow a 'failure'; he sees the strike as an unprecedented act of working-class unity and grassroots democracy. Although detractors on the left and the right have sought to 'belittle' and 'discredit' the movement as too extreme or 'naive,' he argues, 'the General Strike represented the highest point in a longer process of socialist and working-class organization.' At the same time, neither was the general strike all that revolutionary. The principal agitators had sought to push the edges of what was possible for an industrial action. Even in radical Seattle, the general strike was always a bit of a Rorschach test for distinct communities who participated with varying degrees of pragmatism and idealism. 'It wasn't that the strikers were inexperienced as organizers and fighters,' Winslow surmises. 'Rather, there had never been such a strike before, not in the United States, and their aims were not always clear. Some were striking to gain a definite wage increase for their brother workers in the shipyards. Others, a very few, were striking because they thought 'The Revolution' was about to arrive.' Many saw the strike 'just as a show of solidarity.'

So Winslow's history of the strike concludes a bit like the event itself: without any great climax, just an appreciation of the power of a direct action that succeeded primarily in demonstrating what workers could achieve in an American city: even if the worker's core demands were basic, the tactics—seizing the local economy and governing themselves—encapsulated a visionary ethos. Over one hundred years later, Seattle's general strike is a reminder that the sheer audacity of a whole city walking off the job, even if just for a few days, is enough to scare hell out of the powers that be—not because it threatens chaos, but because, when workers are in control, a true labor peace can emerge.

Reviewer Bio

Michelle Chen teaches at the City University of New York, is a contributing editor at *Dissent Magazine,* and co-hosts the *Belabored* podcast.