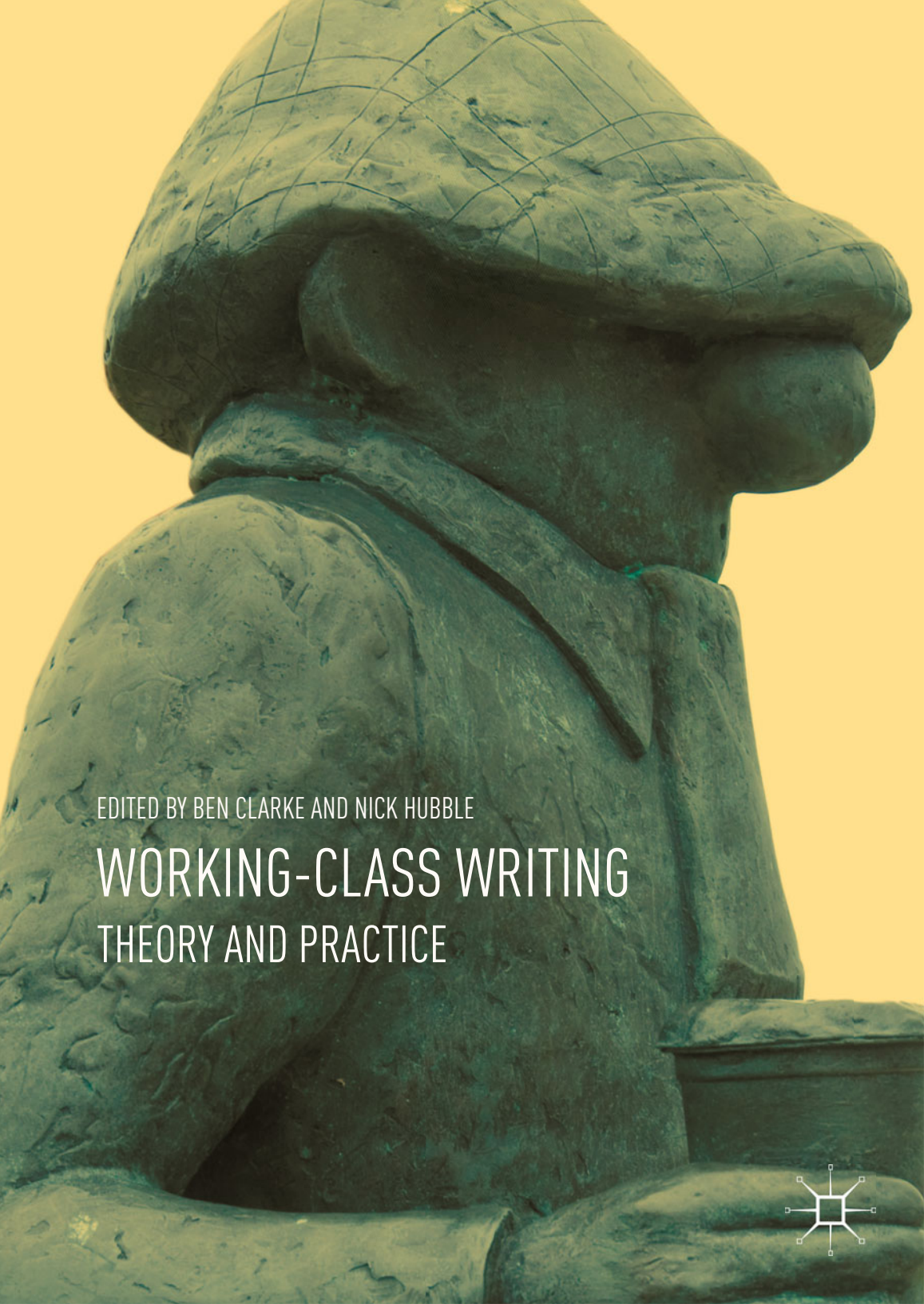




EDITED BY BEN CLARKE AND NICK HUBBLE

WORKING-CLASS WRITING
THEORY AND PRACTICE



Working-Class Writing

Ben Clarke · Nick Hubble
Editors

Working-Class Writing

Theory and Practice

palgrave
macmillan

Editors

Ben Clarke
University of North Carolina
at Greensboro
Greensboro, NC, USA

Nick Hubble
Department of Arts and Humanities
Brunel University London
Uxbridge, UK

ISBN 978-3-319-96309-9 ISBN 978-3-319-96310-5 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96310-5>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018949036

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2018

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: Sculpture of Andy Capp by Jane Robbins, used here with her kind permission. Alan King/Alamy Stock Photo

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all our contributors for their expertise, patience and generosity when responding to our queries and guidance as this book has gradually taken shape. We have enjoyed excellent support throughout from the editorial team at Palgrave, especially Ben Doyle and Camille Davies, who have been instrumental in bringing this book to fruition.

Pamela Fox's chapter first appeared as the introduction to the 2016 reissue of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's *Helen of Four Gates*, a volume in the ongoing Ethel Carnie Holdsworth Series, edited by Nicola Wilson, and published by Kennedy & Boyd. We are grateful to Stuart Johnson of Kennedy & Boyd for permission to reprint this piece.

We would also like to thank the sculptor Jane Robbins for permission to use an image of her Andy Capp sculpture, which is situated in Hartlepool, on the cover of this book.

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
	Ben Clarke and Nick Hubble	
 Part I Theories		
2	Working-Class Writing and Experimentation	17
	Ben Clarke	
3	Interwoven Histories: Working Class Literature and Theory	41
	Jack Windle	
4	Meaning It: Everyday Hermeneutics and the Language of Class in Literary Scholarship	61
	Cassandra Falke	
5	Kings in Disguise and ‘Pure Ellen Kellond’: Literary Social Passing in the Early Twentieth Century	81
	Luke Seaber	

- 6 Democratic Art or Working-Class Literature? Virginia Woolf, the Women's Cooperative Guild and Literary Value in the 'Introductory Letter' 99
Natasha Periyán
- 7 The Bakhtin Circle in Caribbean London: Race, Class and Narrative Strategy 121
Matti Ron
- 8 "Look at the State of This Place!": The Impact of Domestic Space on Post-war Class Consciousness 143
Simon Lee

Part II Practices

- 9 Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's *Helen of Four Gates*: Recasting Melodrama in Novel and Cinematic Form 167
Pamela Fox
- 10 Representation of the Working Classes of the British Colonies and/as the Subalterns in Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* 187
Sabujkoli Bandopadhyay
- 11 London Jewish ... and Working-Class? Social Mobility and Boundary-Crossing in Simon Blumenfeld and Alexander Baron 207
Jason Finch
- 12 The Deindustrial Novel: Twenty-First-Century British Fiction and the Working Class 229
Phil O'Brien

13	Working-Class Heritage Revisited in Alan Warner's <i>The Deadman's Pedal</i> Peter Clandfield	247
14	Respectability, Nostalgia and Shame in Contemporary English Working-Class Fiction Nick Hubble	269
	Index	289

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Sabujkoli (Sabu) Bandopadhyay works at the University of Regina, Canada. She received her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Alberta in 2016. The majority of her current research and writing focus on the representations and the problems of representations of the subaltern in relation to working-class historiography (in the contexts of colonialism, modernity and globalization). On a grand scale, she is interested in studying how the literary sphere has responded to social and political movements in the various pockets of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the global north. Her work is influenced by the thoughts of Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Frantz Fanon and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak among others.

Peter Clandfield currently teaches in the Department of English at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Alberta. His research interests include contemporary Scottish literature and culture, representations of urban environments and urban development, and crime fiction. He has published recent articles and book chapters on related topics: explorations of spatial justice in the novels of Denise Mina and Ian Rankin; critiques of “regeneration” in police procedurals; representations of Glasgow’s Red Road housing scheme in various media; the depiction of Baltimore in *The Wire*; and the presence of Edinburgh in the work of Irvine Welsh (a piece co-written with Christian Lloyd).

Ben Clarke is Associate Professor of British Literature after 1900 at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, USA. He is author of *Orwell in Context: Communities, Myths, Values* (2007), and co-author of *Understanding Richard Hoggart: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2011). He has written articles or book chapters on subjects including public houses, mining communities, Englishness, and Western representations of Taiwan, and on authors including Jack Hilton, H. G. Wells, Edward Upward and Virginia Woolf.

Cassandra Falke is a Professor of English Literature at the University of Tromsø and the coordinator for the English Literature section. Her books include *Intersections in Christianity and Critical Theory* (ed. 2010), *Literature by the Working Class: English Autobiography, 1820–1848* (2013), and most recently *The Phenomenology of Love and Reading* (2016). She has also authored articles about Wordsworth, Byron, Coleridge, Keats, liberal arts education, contemporary phenomenology and the portrayal of violence in literature. Her grants and awards have included a Fulbright professorship, two National Endowment for the Humanities stipends, a workshop coordination grant from the Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities and Social Sciences, and a Distinguished Professor designation for teaching.

Jason Finch is Assistant Professor of English Literature at Åbo Akademi University and Adjunct Professor in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Turku, both in Finland. He has written or co-edited six books, most recently *Deep Locational Criticism* (2016) and *Literary Second Cities* (co-edited, 2017). Jason is a co-founder of the Association for Literary Urban Studies (ALUS) and currently (2018–2020) its President. His current research focuses on the literary history of the London ‘slum’, and on mediations of the urbanity of British and US cities which boomed in the nineteenth century, including Birmingham, Liverpool, Bradford, St Louis and Memphis.

Pamela Fox is a feminist scholar of working-class and women’s literature/culture. She is the author of numerous articles, two books, and one co-edited critical volume including: *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890–1945* (Duke UP); *Natural Acts: Gender, Race, and Rusticity in Country Music* (University of Michigan Press); and *Old Roots, New Routes: The Cultural Politics of Alt.Country*

Music, co-edited with Barbara Ching (University of Michigan Press). She is Professor of English at Georgetown University (USA), where she teaches classes for both the English Department and the Women's and Gender Studies Programme on feminist lit and cultural theory, British and American working-class literature and popular culture, and cultural constructions of motherhood.

Nick Hubble is Reader in English at Brunel University London, UK. Author of *Mass-Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory* (2006/2010) and *The Proletarian Answer to the Modernist Question* (2017); co-author of *Ageing, Narrative and Identity* (2013); co-editor of *The Science Fiction Handbook* (2013), *London in Contemporary British Fiction* (2016), *The Science Fiction of Iain M. Banks* (2018) and four volumes of Bloomsbury's 'British Fiction: The Decades Series': *The 1970s* (2014), *The 1990s* (2015), *The 2000s* (2015) and *The 1950s* (2018); and also co-editor of special issues of the journals *EnterText*, *Literary London* and *New Formations*. Nick has published journal articles or book chapters on writers including Pat Barker, Ford Madox Ford, B. S. Johnson, Naomi Mitchison, George Orwell, Christopher Priest, John Sommerfield and Edward Upward.

Simon Lee recently received his Ph.D. from the University of California, Riverside, where he researches and teaches twentieth and twenty-first-century British literature. His scholarship explores the ramifications of space and environment on class consciousness and his new book project, *Working-Class Heroics*, centres on the aesthetics of the kitchen sink realism movement of the long 1960s. He has published on authors such as John Osborne, Alan Sillitoe, Shelagh Delaney, Nell Dunn, and Colin MacInnes in addition to publishing essays and articles theorizing working-class writing. He is currently developing articles on censorship in the British New Wave and the role of nostalgia in Sid Chaplin's Newcastle novels.

Phil O'Brien completed his Ph.D. on class, neoliberalism, and twenty-first-century British fiction at the University of Manchester in 2016. He has written on the contemporary British novel for *Textual Practice* and on 1930s fiction for *Literature and History*. He is secretary of the Raymond Williams Society and on the editorial board of *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism*. His forthcoming projects

include an edited collection to be published by Verso of Williams's previously uncollected essays as well as a book chapter on radical 1980s theatre which will appear in *Accelerated Times: British Literature in Transition, 1980–2000* (Cambridge University Press).

Natasha Periyán is a Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow at Goldsmiths College, University of London, having previously taught at Royal Holloway and Falmouth University. She has published articles and book chapters on Virginia Woolf, periodical culture, and modernism and education. Her book, *The Politics of 1930s British Literature: Education, Class, Gender* (Bloomsbury, 2018) considers how the educational involvements and teaching practice of a wide range of 1930s writers informed their class and gender politics, their cultural ideals, and the development of their aesthetics. Her current research considers the politics and aesthetics of interwar women writers.

Matti Ron is a doctoral candidate at the University of East Anglia, working on his Ph.D. thesis, *Representing revolt: working-class representation as a literary and political practice from the General Strike to the 'Winter of Discontent'*. His research focuses on intersectional approaches to class in twentieth-century British literature as well as the structural limitations of particular forms in representing, both in the political and literary sense, working-class subjectivity and agency. He is author of 'A Vision of the Future: Race and Anti-Racism in 1950s British Fiction' in Nick Hubble, Alice Ferrebe and Nick Bentley (eds.) *The 1950s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and in 2018 received a 'Young Scholar and Activist Fellowship' from the Working-Class Studies Association.

Luke Seaber is Tutor in Modern European Culture for the Undergraduate Preparatory Certificate for the Humanities at University College London; he was previously a Marie Curie Research Fellow in the Department of English at the same university. His most recent book is *Incognito Social Investigation in British Literature: Certainties in Degradation* (2017).

Jack Windle was awarded a Ph.D. by the University of Sheffield for his thesis *Class, Culture & Colonialism: Working-Class Writing in the Twentieth Century*. His work covers the whole spectrum of British working-class literature, from eighteenth-century balladeers through

the ‘golden ages’ of twentieth-century prose, theatre and film (the 1930s and the 1950s–1960s) right up to Tony Harrison’s recent poetry. Publications include a chapter on Harrison, Sam Selvon and immigration in Goodridge and Keegan’s CUP volume *A History of British Working Class Literature*, a republication of *The Songs of Joseph Mather* (both 2017) and an influential article on Walter Greenwood’s 1933 classic *Love on the Dole* (2011 in *Literature & History*). He has collaborated with musicians, artists, writers and theatre practitioners (Ray Hearne, Sarah Jane Palmer, Steven Kay and the Babbling Vagabonds) on projects about working-class culture and is currently researching Jack Hilton and the Sheffield novelist Len Doherty proletics.wordpress.com.



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Ben Clarke and Nick Hubble

On 13th July 2016, Theresa May gave her first speech as Conservative leader and British Prime Minister outside 10 Downing Street. Her predecessor, David Cameron, had resigned less than a month earlier after losing a referendum on Britain's European Union membership that had exposed deep divisions within the country, and she sought to reinforce her image as a one-nation Conservative by speaking directly to people previously excluded from the political process. These included working-class voters who had been marginalized or ignored by the Conservatives, who were, as May herself had recognized more than a decade earlier, "too narrow" in their "sympathies" (White and Perkins). Her speech promised a new relation between government and the governed founded on an extension of these sympathies to include the poor and precarious:

B. Clarke (✉)

University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC, USA

e-mail: b_clarke@uncg.edu

N. Hubble

Department of Arts and Humanities, Brunel University London,
Uxbridge, UK

e-mail: Nick.Hubble@brunel.ac.uk

© The Author(s) 2018

B. Clarke and N. Hubble (eds.), *Working-Class Writing*,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96310-5_1

If you're from an ordinary working class family, life is much harder than many people in Westminster realise. You have a job but you don't always have job security. You have your own home but you worry about paying the mortgage. You can just about manage, but you worry about the cost of living and getting your kids into a good school. If you're one of those families, if you're just managing, I want to address you directly. I know you're working around the clock, I know you're doing your best and I know that sometimes life can be a struggle. The Government I lead will be driven, not by the interests of the privileged few, but by yours. We will do everything we can to give you more control over your lives.

Even in her relatively brief remarks, May repeatedly returned to the claim that her government would “prioritize not the wealthy, but you,” that it would “work for every one of us” (May). She not only addressed a working-class audience (“you”) but identified with it, including herself in a national “us,” implicitly constructed in opposition to an ill-defined but powerful “them.” She maintained this approach at the Conservative Party conference later in the year, in a speech Charlie Cooper described for *Politico* as making a “bold appeal to working-class voters disillusioned by rising inequality,” in which she promised to shift “the balance of Britain decisively in favour of ordinary working-class people” (“Theresa May”). The idea of “blue-collar Conservatism” promoted by David Cameron, with its emphasis on “hard-working” families who wanted the “dignity of a job, the pride of a paycheque, a home of their own,” (Mason and Watt) became a defining feature of May’s early tenure, a response not only to the immediate conditions of Brexit but to longer-term economic and political changes.

In practice, May’s government has not supported “ordinary working-class people” against the “privileged few”; her commitment was always rhetorical not material. Her speech is significant, not as a statement of intent, but because it demonstrates both the increased prominence of the working classes in political discourse since the Great Recession began in 2008 and its limited impact on political practice. Despite the promise to give the working class “more control” over their lives their concerns and perspectives have not shaped policy and have largely been represented by powerful forces and figures who claim to speak on their behalf. The process is not confined to Britain; there are parallels between May’s promise to articulate the concerns of “ordinary” people and Donald Trump’s insistence in his inaugural address that he represented the interests of the “forgotten men and women of our country” (“Inaugural Address”).

Trump's speech may have been, as his Republican predecessor George W. Bush allegedly said, "some weird shit" (Tracy) but his claim continued a major strategy of his campaign; as Molly Ball argued, the "blue collar man is the mascot and enigma of the Trump era," (Ball) repeatedly evoked to suggest his distance from "elites," a vaguely-defined category which, as Cathleen Decker pointed out, has so far included "the government's intelligence agencies, the media, foreign allies, the Department of Justice, establishment politicians, scientists and the Congressional Budget Office" (Decker). Both May and Trump recognize that economic and political pressures demand a renewed concern with the working classes, but have sought, in different ways, to confine this to their representation, to give them, in Walter Benjamin's terms, "not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves," (234) or, more strictly, to be expressed. Despite conspicuous differences between the methods the two employ, perhaps best demonstrated in the contrast between Trump's disorderly, sometimes violent populist rallies and May's limited, uncomfortable, choreographed interactions with the public, there are common elements in the conditions they confront and their attempts to address them without altering the distribution of power.

What has been largely absent from recent discussions has been the perspectives and voices of the working classes, and consequently any substantive attempt to examine, disrupt, or extend existing understandings of them. Despite considerable media attention, they have largely been both celebrated and demonized in stereotypical terms, as, on the one hand, the "ordinary," hard-working families of May's speech and, on the other, as the kind of dysfunctional communities represented by Kevin Williamson, "whose main products are misery and used heroin needles" (Williamson). Political discourse continues to engage, not with the working classes, but with fantasies that simplify the people they purport to describe. These images are determined by their function rather than their ostensible object, the ways in which they can be used to justify specific political and economic practices. The policies of both the Trump administration and some advocates of Brexit, for example, depend partly on their ability to deploy an idea of the working class as a neglected white, "native" population, centred on traditional manufacturing industries and threatened, not only by ill-defined transnational elites and "outsiders" such as refugees, but by minorities within the country, who supposedly received preferential treatment from previous, more liberal, governments. Defining the working class in this way limits both inclusion in the

nation and the values it embodies and has an effect on the distribution of material as well as symbolic resources. There is consequently something at stake in such acts of interpretation. Changing the ways in which the working classes are represented and understood has the potential to alter the political culture and actions of notionally democratic states whose legitimacy depends upon their claim to represent the will of the "people." This means not only recognizing the agency of working class people, their ability to speak about their own interests, but the diversity of experiences and identities potentially encompassed by the category "working class" itself. Accepting that the "forgotten men and women" of America include Hispanic agricultural workers in California as well as white coal miners in Virginia would lead to a radically different understanding of the United States to that which currently shapes government policy, though it is not a matter of simply substituting one for the other. The object of a new critical and political practice cannot be choosing between existing narratives of oppression, a process that inevitably results in what Sally Munt calls the "fragmentation of sympathetic discourse," (7) but must involve an extension of existing categories that recognizes the material and experiential connections between seemingly disparate people and phenomena. Despite their differences, undocumented cleaners and unemployed former steel workers are victims of the same system, which forces them into competition with one another.

Struggles over definitions necessarily occur in a variety of cultural spaces, and, within universities, across a range of disciplines. This volume contends that the production, reading, and analysis of literature is central to this process, that it can make a distinct, valuable contribution to the understanding not only of working-class histories but the category "working class" itself, and that a greater critical attention to class, and the working class in particular, would extend both the methods and object of literary studies. While important work has been done in this area, many of the key texts, such as Jeremy Hawthorn's collection *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century* (1984), Andy Croft's *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (1990), Pamela Fox's *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890–1945* (1994), and Ian Haywood's *Working-Class Fiction: From Chartism to Trainspotting* (1997), are now more than twenty years old. The marginalization of working-class studies not only exposes the conservatism of many literature departments but changes in the priorities of many on the left. Critical attention began to shift away from questions

of class as early as the nineteen-seventies in response to new theoretical ideas, social conditions and emancipatory movements; as Munt argues, the fact that “the CCCS [the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies] moved away from working-class (primarily youth) subjects and subcultures, to critique other social structures such as gender, sexuality and race” at this time responded to “[m]ore general political transformations” (5). The change in focus exposed the limitations of much contemporary left-wing thought and practice, the forms of oppression it failed to recognize or address, but too often displaced rather than extended existing emancipatory theories. The problem continued and intensified in some later forms of identity politics. This collection does not ignore the considerable political and interpretative advances made in the process, but argues it is time to return to the problems of class that were abandoned to right-wing populists. Neither Donald Trump nor Theresa May can be allowed to speak for the marginalized; they must be allowed to speak for themselves. Literary scholars can contribute to this process by opening critical spaces, by recovering and discussing voices, analyzing methods, and tracing debates and struggles.

Any return to working-class writing must be informed by feminist, postcolonial, and queer studies, exploring the intersections of class with gender, ethnic and sexual identities rather than reverting to earlier critical models from which these categories were largely absent. It must also recognize class as a contingent political category that not only alters in response to changes in the means and relations of production, but is always deployed under specific conditions for particular ends. New analyses are always necessary because both the object and methods of study change. Working-class writing is essential to understanding this complexity, in part because it insists upon the specificity and complexities of working-class experience, which political, historical and sociological accounts often erase. Its attention to the particular reveals the ways in which class intersects with other identities and allegiances, resulting in productive tensions, new forms of knowledge and activism. Both the working class and the discourses through which its interests are articulated have been redefined, even in recent decades, by a variety of historical events and forces, from the intensification of neoliberal policies and ideas to changes in patterns of immigration and the rise of new protest movements. Literature is able to trace the lived impact of these changes and the complex relations between the various elements that shape individual and collective identities. Its commitment to what

Richard Hoggart called “experiential wholeness,” with the ways in which lives are shaped by many “different orders of things, *all at once*,” (20–21) enables it to avoid establishing reductive hierarchies. A concern with class does not somehow displace or supersede one with gender or sexuality; these categories are mutually constitutive, continually shaping and reshaping one another at the level of the individual as well as society.

As this suggests, the term working class does not describe a fixed or essential quality of a group or person; it at once represents and interprets a condition that is at least in principle contingent. An individual’s class identity is a product of their economic and cultural position rather than their essential nature, and may alter with changes in their situation, though rarely as simply or completely as narratives of social mobility suggest. It also depends on both the individual and social understanding of that position, a process of interpretation informed by a range of factors, from philosophy to political organization and activism. Class is never simply there, a neutral, obvious, generally accepted category. Any study of working-class writing must consequently explore the ways in which the category is constituted and used, as well as analyzing specific texts. The subtitle of this volume reflects this divide, as well as the necessary relation between theory and practice central to radical traditions, a relation most famously articulated in Marx’s argument that philosophy should not only interpret but change the world (Marx 118). The chapters have been loosely divided into two groups, those in part one which focus on the ways in which the term working-class writing is understood and the functions it serves, and those in part two which concentrate on specific textual interpretations. The difference is one of emphasis rather than kind; all the essays perform both kinds of work. Making this abstract distinction as the outset is important because it emphasizes the nature and complexities of working-class literary studies, which must continually explore and define the field it analyses.

The volume opens with Ben Clarke’s chapter, “Working-Class Writing and Experimentation.” This considers how the emphasis on experimentation in twentieth-century literary histories has served to marginalize working-class writing, which has repeatedly been described as confined by nineteenth-century realist forms and as innovative only at the level of content. Working-class novels and even poetry are often aligned with the “lower” category of documentary writing, and figured as significant primarily as a source of historical data. Clarke employs a close analysis of interwar texts including James Hanley’s *Men in Darkness*, James Barke’s

Major Operation and, particularly, Jack Hilton's *Caliban Shrieks* to challenge the idea that working-class writers simply reproduced conventional realist forms. He argues that their work instead attempted to redefine these under new conditions, to exploit their aesthetic and political possibilities without being confined by their histories. In advocating for a renewed critical consideration of working-class writing that sees it, not as breaking with the modernist critique of modernity but as an attempt to rethink its terms within the context of particular social and political struggles, this chapter draws on the work of Rancière to construct a historicized, political model of experimentation; a theoretical project that has implications, not only for the understanding and evaluation of working-class writing but also for broader literary histories.

In Chapter 3, "Interwoven Histories: Working-Class Literature and Theory," Jack Windle responds to Peter Hitchcock's assertion that "theories of class must be rethought on the basis of postcolonial historiographical, anthropological, and literary research on subaltern voice and subjectivity," by arguing that a multifocal discussion of theory is necessary not only for a new model of social class but for a new critical understanding of working-class writing. The chapter consists of three interlocking sections. The first considers the ways in which working-class writers traverse the lines between criticism, political engagement, theory, and literary production by means of an analysis of Richard Hoggart's reception by French theorists such as Lévi-Strauss and Passeron and working-class writers including Braine and Harrison to explore a deep-seated antipathy towards the working class within the academy in general and literary criticism in particular. The second section examines the interwoven histories of the British working class and postcolonial peoples. Engaging with recent work by Gilroy, Skeggs, Garner and Tyler, it argues that whilst contemporary academic and political discourse is complicit in a long history of racializing the working class, working-class writers have consistently rejected this "centuries long ideological labour" (Garner). The British working-class is a postcolonial constituency whose "demotic multiculturalism" (Gilroy) resists notions of a racist "white working class" and challenges the divisive rhetoric of politicians, journalists and some critics. The third section draws on Skeggs's understanding of the "white working class" as the "constitutive outsider 'at home'" and her discussion of historical constructions of the working class as excrement to consider materiality and the body in working-class writing. By outlining how an interdisciplinary approach that combines postcolonial

and social theory with a radically engaged stance can shed new light on the tradition of working-class writing in Britain, the chapter seeks to develop the kind of theoretical framework for the study of working-class writing that has so enriched the analysis of postcolonial and feminist texts since the middle of the twentieth century.

Cassandra Falke's chapter, "Meaning It: Everyday Hermeneutics and the Language of Class in Literary Scholarship," is concerned with finding a language for studying working-class authors and experiences. Noting how historical accounts of British literary criticism often insist on an opposition between empathy and theory, and the consequent accusation of Williams and Hoggart for "romanticization" and "nostalgic organicism," Falke asks where contemporary critics look for the particular kind of writing needed to discuss working-class authorship? She goes on to explore the ways in which working-class scholars have contributed to the rhetoric of literary criticism; paying particular attention to how such authors strive to write in a way that will resonate with readers whose language is grounded more in embodied than in textual experience. Rather than emphasize the obstacles remaining, Falke focuses on what has been accomplished so far by scholars who rebelled against a language that would alienate them from their working-class upbringing and the strategies they have employed.

In Chapter 5, "Kings in Disguise and 'Pure Ellen Kellond': Literary Social Passing in the Early Twentieth Century," Luke Seaber provides a different perspective on working-class writing by focusing on the phenomenon of "social passing" in which an upper- or middle-class writer passes themselves off as working-class. After outlining some of the issues involved in such social passing, particularly in relation to the genre of incognito social investigation, he moves on to a fascinating comparison between the uses of working-class or lower-middle-class voices in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In arguing that the effect of such texts is to draw attention to the difference between the (privileged) writing voice and the voices represented, Seaber suggests that perhaps modernism was more conservative than the writing of a generation before in its refusal to let working-class voices speak for themselves. In the remainder of the chapter, he goes on to consider the extent to which the generation following the modernists, the writers of the 1930s, crossed over to the working class, with particular reference to the example of W. H. Auden. In conclusion, Seaber wonders whether literary social passing is more concerned with the needs of a literary intelligentsia

to appropriate the voices of others than to give any expression to the working classes themselves.

Natasha Periyar's chapter, "Democratic Art or Working-Class Literature? Virginia Woolf, the Women's Cooperative Guild and Literary Value in the 'Introductory Letter'," provides an interesting contrast with Seaber's in its focus on Virginia Woolf's work to develop a suitable framework for the introduction she was writing for a volume which most certainly did give expression to working-class voices: *Life as We Have Known It*, a collection of testimonials by members of the Women's Co-operative Guild which was edited by Margaret Llewelyn Davies. As Periyar demonstrates, Woolf paid sustained attention to the women's narratives and the resultant manner she found of critiquing middle-class literary discourse and thereby opening the way for working-class involvement in literature and criticism contradicts familiar accusations of Woolf's snobbery and exclusiveness. Periyar goes on to suggest that the pains Woolf took with the "Introductory Letter" place it within a broader literary continuum with others such as John Lehmann, who also made sustained efforts to publish working-class writers.

In Chapter 7, "The Bakhtin Circle in Caribbean London: Race, Class and Narrative Strategy," Matti Ron notes how although discussion of the working class has, after lengthy absence, re-entered mainstream discourse, this class is often assumed to be an inherently white one harbouring "legitimate concerns around immigration." Arguing that the working class is always ethnically heterogeneous, he analyses how the struggles—both political and literary—of Britain's black working-class led to a radical reevaluation of the very concepts of class and class struggle. In particular, Ron applies Vološinov's concept of the "multi-accentuality" of the word to the frequent use of vernacular in Britain's "Windrush Generation" authors, who experimented with form and narrative voice, to assert the legitimacy of their own cultural identities. By taking Vološinov into Caribbean London via Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, George Lamming's *The Emigrants* and ER Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love*, Ron shows how these forms of struggle inherent within language, rather than contradict each other, actually intersect to form a complex understanding of the articulation between class and racial oppressions, doing so in such a way as to parallel the socio-political coming-into-being of the black working class in Britain.

In Simon Lee's chapter, "'Look at the State of This Place!': The Impact of Domestic Space on Post-war Class Consciousness," he analyses the

British Kitchen Sink movement to explore shifts in the British working-class imaginary. Arguing that disciplinary mechanisms of working-class domestic spaces in mid-century England produced frustration, inscribing behavioural norms tied to class identities, he seeks to show how books written in the 1950s and 1960s suggest a modification in class consciousness that challenges the domestic and anticipates a restructuring of working-class attitudes and beliefs. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's tripartite model of spatial production, Michel Foucault's conception of non-hegemonic space, and work by Doreen Massey, David Harvey, Edward Soja, and Bertrand Westphal, Lee explores fictional representations of working-class environments to argue that space is never truly stable, but is always being rewritten by the changing needs of those it seeks to inscribe. These changing needs are at the root of a powerful shift in the working-class imaginary that challenges the notion of a unified class consciousness.

The first chapter of "Part Two: Practices," Pamela Fox's "Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's *Helen of Four Gates*: Recasting Melodrama in Novel and Cinematic Form" was originally published as the introduction to the 2016 reissue of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's *Helen of Four Gates* in the Kennedy and Boyd edition of Carnie Holdsworth's works. It includes perhaps more biographical and descriptive material than usual for an analytical academic article but this was the very quality which suggested its suitability to us as a case study illustrating how the complexities of intersectional demands can be met in practice by working-class writers. Fox outlines how the former mill worker's writing career developed at the beginning of the twentieth century and, in particular, how Carnie Holdsworth's journalistic work enabled her to develop theories including a conception of emotional sensibility as a key component of both class and poetic consciousness. Fox shows how *Helen of Four Gates* distills these theories within a melodramatic framework that allows her to align romance conventions with socialist-feminist aims in order to reimagine freedom. Fox also goes on to discuss, how due to Carnie Holdsworth's underlying narrative, the 1921 film version of *Helen of Four Gates* provides a darker vision of post-First-World-War England than the pastoral norms of its cinematic competitors, which complicates the class and gender politics of such films.

In Chapter 10, "Representation of the Working Classes of the British Colonies and/as the Subalterns in Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*," Sabujkoli Bandopadhyay argues that the colonial working-class of the subcontinent

shared a dialogic relationship with British working classes during the late colonial period. Focusing on Mulk Raj Anand's 1936 novel *Coolie*, she examines how the colonial, racial and imperial relationship between the Empire and its colony influenced the nature and scope of working-class literature. In analyzing how, despite being assigned the nomenclature of the "native-informant," Anand's choice of writing about the subcontinental working-class in English emancipated his work from its regional boundaries and attained a true international character, Bandopadhyay situates *Coolie* as an example of inter World War working-class literature, and considers how his fictional representation of the colonial working-class adds to our understanding of the British working-class tradition.

Jason Finch's chapter, "London Jewish ... and Working-Class? Social Mobility and Boundary-Crossing in Simon Blumenfeld and Alexander Baron," sets out to fill in the gaps that are left when "working-class writing" is understood as paradigmatically concerned with the lives of industrial workers and their families, in the Midlands, the North of England, South Wales or central Scotland, where the oppositions between capital and labour were locally the starkest. Arguing that London itself has a rich, complicated and nuanced place in the story of twentieth-century British class relations, he suggests that London Jewish writers tell, in a way that with few exceptions non-Jewish London writers before the 1960s do not, the story of the London working classes. Moreover, Finch demonstrates how London Jewish writers challenge "working class" as a category in the way that they chronicle the "up-and-out" move in which, in class-stratified Britain, working-class people often aspire not to be working-class. In this manner, he introduces a particular complexity to discussions of the working class, which is that members of the working class can make money as capitalists and successful capitalists can perceive themselves as working-class. As Finch notes, this tendency has powerful resonances in the era of a government attempting to redefine the working class as the people who work, as opposed to those who survive on benefits.

In Chapter 12, "The Deindustrial Novel: Twenty-First-Century British Fiction and the Working Class," Phil O'Brien draws on Raymond Williams's argument that work and the industrial landscape are key formative influences and applies it to twenty-first century fictional representations of once industrial working-class communities, which have undergone profound social and economic change due to neoliberalism, deindustrialisation, and unemployment. He analyses Anthony

Cartwright's *The Afterglow* (2004), Catherine O'Flynn's *What Was Lost* (2007), and Edward Hogan's *Blackmoor* (2008) as texts which attempt to document a specific structure of feeling emerging out of the distinctively post-Thatcher landscape of late twentieth/early twenty-first century deindustrial Britain. O'Brien demonstrates how the consequences of deindustrialisation are not restricted to those (predominantly) male workers, who lose their jobs through the closure of industrial plants, factories, and mines which feature in the novels of Cartwright, O'Flynn, and Hogan, but also alter the dynamics of class, creating shifts in the gender roles which make up the "traditional" working-class family, as well as creating an inheritance of loss which is passed onto successive generations.

Peter Clandfield's chapter, "Working-Class Heritage Revisited in Alan Warner's *The Deadman's Pedal*," focuses on *The Deadman's Pedal* as a novel which highlights the contemporary value of revisiting the social-democratic, public heritage that was constructed largely by, as well as for, working-class people in Britain during the decades after the Second World War. Comparing the novel with Raymond Williams's *Border Country* (1960), he focuses on how both novels reveal a powerful incremental emphasis on *movement*—of trains, goods, people—as central to the work that working-class people do. Clandfield also makes a compelling comparison between *Deadman's Pedal* and Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* and argues that Warner employs these echoes and connections to challenge post-Thatcher underminings and co-options of working-class culture. In this manner, Clandfield argues Warner's work to be exemplary in the way that it shows that the work of the novelist is to construct and recycle cultural resources: all novelists, even Waugh, might be seen as workers in this sense.

Finally, Nick Hubble's chapter, "Respectability, Nostalgia and Shame in Contemporary English Working-Class Fiction," examines gendered working-class responses ranging from shame to nostalgia for the "common proletarian way of life" which the historian Eric Hobsbawm identified, in mainly masculine terms, as the dominant structure of feeling within the British working class during the first half of the twentieth century. Through analysis of three key texts—Pat Barker's *Union Street* (1982), Gordon Burns's *The North of England Home Service* (2003), and Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012)—he maps out a process by which some working-class women are shown to reject the structures of feeling and social contexts which restrict them to a subaltern status, while their male contemporaries are more likely to internalize and defend that subaltern

consciousness. Suggesting that this process leads to the prevalence of the familiar and nostalgic trope “whatever happened to the working class?,” which dates back at least to 1970s concerns as reflected in the television series *Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads?*, Hubble argues that new intersectional focuses on difference are important to contest the implicitly homogenizing nostalgia of historical laments for the decline of working-class solidarity and consciousness.

This book is not intended as the definitive word on working-class writing viewed from the perspective of 2018; it can only address a finite number of issues and writers. However, we hope that it will contribute productively to the reawakened interest in matters of class which has risen steadily since at least the 2008 financial crisis. There needs to be a much wider discussion than is currently occurring as to how class operates in the twenty-first century and what different forms are now available to working-class writing in a continually changing social context. Once upon a time, the working class appeared easy to define. The historian Eric Hobsbawm (1978) identified “the famous cap immortalized by the Andy Capp cartoon” (282) as one of the key signs of “a common style of proletarian life” (281) that was dominant in Britain from the 1880s to the 1950s. While it is important to commemorate that culture – as Jane Robbins’s sculpture of Andy Capp, featured on the cover of this book, does (while also implicitly drawing attention to the question of how the working class is represented)—it is equally important not to allow ourselves to become trapped within the social constraints of that past. The analysis of working-class writing and representation over the decades ahead requires new approaches and this book signals an intent that such analyses will assume a central role within academic literary study.

WORKS CITED

- Ball, Molly. 2018. Why Trump’s ‘Forgotten Man’ Still Supports Him. *Time*, 15 February. <http://time.com/5159859/why-trumps-forgotten-man-still-supports-him/>.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1992. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. *Illuminations*, London, 1955.
- Cooper, Charlie. 2016. Theresa May: Working-Class Champion. *Politico*, 5 October. <https://www.politico.eu/article/theresa-may-working-class-champion/>.
- Decker, Cathleen. 2017. Trump’s War Against Elites and Expertise. *L.A. Times*, 27 July. <http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-trump-elites-20170725-story.html>.

- Hobsbawm, Eric. 1978. The Forward March of Labour Halted. *Marxism Today*, September: 279–286.
- Hoggart, Richard. 1970. Literature and Society. In *Speaking to Each Other: Volume Two: About Literature*, 19–39. Oxford University Press.
- Marx, Karl. 1994. On Feuerbach. In *Marx: Early Political Writings*, ed. Joseph O'Malley, 116–118. Cambridge University Press.
- Mason, Rowena, and Nicholas Watt. 2015. David Cameron Lays Out Plans for 'Blue-Collar Conservatism' as Cabinet Meets. *The Guardian*, 12 May. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/may/12/david-cameron-sets-out-priorities-as-conservative-cabinet-meets-for-first-time>.
- May, Theresa. 2016. Statement from the New Prime Minister Theresa May. Gov.uk, 13 July. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-from-the-new-prime-minister-theresa-may>.
- Munt, Sally. 2000. Introduction. In *Cultural Studies and the Working Class: Subject to Change*, ed. Sally Munt, 1–15. Cassell.
- Tracy, Abigail. 2017. George W. Bush Finally Says What He Thinks About Trump. *Vanity Fair*, 19 October. <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/10/george-w-bush-donald-trump>.
- Trump, Donald. 2017. The Inaugural Address. Whitehouse.gov, 20 January. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/the-inaugural-address/>.
- White, Michael, and Anne Perkins. 2002. 'Nasty Party' Warning to Tories. *The Guardian*, 7 October. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/oct/08/uk.conservatives2002>.
- Williamson, Kevin. 2016. Chaos in the Family, Chaos in the State: The White Working Class's Dysfunction. *National Review*, 28 March. <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/432876/donald-trump-white-working-class-dys-function-real-opportunity-needed-not-trump>.

PART I

Theories



CHAPTER 2

Working-Class Writing and Experimentation

Ben Clarke

The literature of the nineteen-thirties is conventionally seen as a failed experiment. As Valentine Cunningham argues, critics represent the decade as a time “of Political Art, of Documentary deviationism, a time of sad Realist cravings, of rampant anti-Formalism, anti-Textualism, and so a sort of unfortunate historical blip or bypass on which writing got snagged and slowed down in the good march of the twentieth century from modernism at the very beginning to postmodernism at the end” (5). From this perspective, the period is significant primarily because its errors clarify the value of the movements that come before and after. In particular, the perceived failings of the nineteen-thirties are used to assert the destructive consequences of commitment and, by extension, the inherent opposition between art and politics. George Orwell’s argument that “the literary history of the thirties seems to justify the opinion that a writer does well to keep out of politics,” (105) a statement best understood as an intervention in historically-specific debates centred on relations between writers and the Communist Party, has acquired what Andy Croft calls an “orthodox authority” (*Red Letter Days* 17) as a

B. Clarke (✉)

University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC, USA

e-mail: b_clarke@uncg.edu

© The Author(s) 2018

B. Clarke and N. Hubble (eds.), *Working-Class Writing*,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96310-5_2

final judgement on the decade and on artists' responsibilities more generally. The nineteen-thirties function as a cautionary tale, a demonstration of the cost of engagement. Its errors are identified not only with the "Auden generation," who, as Alison Light argues, continue to exercise a "mesmeric fascination" over a literary and critical establishment obsessed with "cultural elites," (x) but with the working-class texts published during the decade. As this chapter demonstrates, the position uses established generic hierarchies and ideas about experimentation and artistic value to reinforce the division between literature and politics and in so doing, as Croft argues, exclude "working-class writing – *working-class experience*... from 'English Literature'" (*Red Letter Days* 340). The process not only misrepresents working-class texts as passively reproducing received artistic and political forms but narrows the discussion of innovation itself. A reinterpretation of the nineteen-thirties centred on working-class writing would not only produce a broader model of 'English Literature' but a more complex understanding of experimentation that analyses its functions as well as describing its forms.

Despite a wealth of revisionist scholarship, the idea of the nineteen-thirties as an anomaly, a misguided diversion from the productive main current of twentieth-century literature, has proved remarkably persistent. The decade remains a critical problem that scholars often deal with by simplifying or ignoring it; as Benjamin Kohlmann observes, the "recent flourishing of neo-formalist criticism has virtually bypassed thirties literature, with two notable exceptions: Auden's 'September 1, 1939' and his elegy for Yeats with its resonant warning that 'poetry makes nothing happen'," (12) two texts that seem to support the claim that commitment was an artistic and ethical mistake. As these poems and Orwell's comments indicate, the idea that the decade demonstrates the dangers of engagement emerges in its immediate aftermath, as writers and intellectuals, many of whom had been actively involved in its literary and political struggles, sought to define its major currents and establish new cultural positions for themselves. Their interpretations of the period were used during the Cold War to construct the United States and the countries of Western Europe as open societies in which artists were able to pursue their interests without state interference and to emphasize the ways in which the Soviet Union stifled free expression. In *The God that Failed*, one of the most prominent texts in which writers recanted their involvement with Communism, Stephen Spender insisted that "[a]mongst the Communist intellectuals during the 1930's I noticed behavior which in