

TO WARD IMAGINED SOLIDARITY IN THE
WORKING-CLASS EPIC: CHRIS LLEWELLYN'S FRAGMENTS
FROM THE FIRE AND DIANE GILLIAM FISHER'S
KETTLE BOTTOM

MICHELLE M. TOKARCZYK
Goucher College, Baltimore

The term “solidarity” has been a rallying cry in working-class literature and culture, and for good reason. Pioneers in the field of working-class studies such as Michael Zweig, Janet Zandy, Paul Lauter, and I myself have argued that while middle-class culture emphasizes individual identity and achievement, working-class culture values collective identity and action.¹ Working-class literature, Zandy notes, tells of a people’s suffering, often resulting from economic injustice, rather than the story of a person’s private insecurities (Hands 91). Working-class people bond together in struggle, and in the worst instances, for survival itself. Yet as powerful as the tradition of solidarity based on worker identification might be, political scientists and labor historians agree that it is frequently undermined by rifts along race and ethnic lines.² The prevailing view, according to Erin O’Brien, is that members within an ethnic or racial group bond identify with one another, “feel close with fellow group members, perceive a linked fate with them, and feel disadvantaged compared to other social groups” (13).³ Hence, the demographic diversity of the United States is an

Address correspondence to Michelle M. Tokarczyk, Goucher College, 1021 Dulaney Valley Road, Baltimore, MD 21204-2794. E-mail: M_Tokarczyk@comcast.net

¹See Zweig, *The Working-Class Majority*; Zandy, *Calling Home and Hands*; Lauter, “Under Construction: Working-Class Writing”; Tokarczyk and Fay, *Working-Class Women in the Academy*.

²Erin O’Brien cites the following as among the scholars who have argued that racial and ethnic identities undermine worker identities: Wilson, *The Bridge Over the Racial Divide* and Scholzman and Verba, *Injury to Insult*.

³In *The Politics of Identity: Solidarity Building among America’s Working Poor*, O’Brien surveys low-wage workers about their attitudes toward workers of other races and the ways in which they see their individual interests converging with those of other service workers.

anchor weighing down worker solidarity (12). The building of solidarity and the forms it may take (from recognizing shared fates, to commiserating about grievances, to unionizing) are, as O'Brien notes, complex and varied.

The tensions between working-class solidarity and ethnic and racial identity are as old as the United States itself, and proletarian writers often addressed them through depictions of workers coming to class consciousness by recognizing affinities with workers of other races and ethnic origins. Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* (1932) includes brief scenes of whites recognizing affinities with African Americans; in Pietro di Donato's *Christ in Concrete* (1937) a friendship forms between the Italian-American protagonist and a Jewish boy. Labor literature has never again reached the heyday of popularity it enjoyed in the 1930s, but political and social developments since the 1980s have prompted some contemporary writers to interrogate workers' conditions and to look for new forms through which to do so.⁴ The conditions of American workers have seriously deteriorated: wages are stagnant, unions have lost power, and benefits are increasingly rare. These conditions are due to what the Labor Institute in its report has termed the "Four Horsemen of the Workplace": downsizing, globalization, automation, and increased reliance on contingent labor (*Hands* 98). If working-class people are to have any hope of reclaiming lost ground, they must recognize their common interests. In the words of Janet Zandy, they must move from filiation to affiliation, from identification with race or ethnicity to identification with shared conditions and grievances (*Hands* 138).

Additionally, since the heyday of the proletarian novel, Americans have become more attuned to the fact that our nation has always been multiethnic and multiracial, and is indeed becoming more so. (The election and presidency of Barack Obama is perhaps the most obvious example of this development.) Many working-class communities, however, are close-knit and suspicious

⁴A 1930s style proletarian novel, which depicts a young person coming to working-class consciousness and identification with labor, would be difficult to construct now because organized labor has lost so much power. The proletarian novel has often been criticized as dogmatic and prescriptive, but some contemporary critics have attempted to revision it. In particular, Barbara Foley in *Radical Representations* argues that the proletarian novel failed because it was not radical enough, not because it was too radical.

of outsiders. Immigrant texts such as Anzia Yezierska's *The Bread Givers* (1925) or Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1975) rarely mention people outside the protagonist's ethnic community. Similarly, as Larry Smith in his listing of characteristics of Appalachian literature claims that, "Ethnocentrism is present in families, towns, counties. Distrust comes first till one is revealed as 'one of us,' then welcome is extended."⁵ Such wariness is revealed in Dorothy Allison's *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* (1995) when the protagonist's aunt and mother comment in exasperation at the family tree assignment given by a teacher "not from around here." Given the limited and often negative interactions marginalized people have with outsiders, some xenophobia is understandable. Yet it is nonetheless often destructive. Working-class writers respond to such fears of the Other by imagining the bonds among working-class people and the possibility of community across racial and ethnic identities. The word "imagining" is crucial, for I take my cue from Edward Said's claim in *Culture and Imperialism* that culture not only reflects its society, but creates it. Said's work discusses how the ideology implicit in British nineteenth-century literary texts creates empire, but it is also possible for literary texts to create resistance. In his commentary on the political in literature, Jean-Jacques Lecercle states that he is "proposing not a return to the old Marxist concept of literature as a reflection of the historical, political, and linguistic conjectures but an active concept of literature as an intervention in them" (919). This imaginative creation is particularly important at a time when workers have few organizations as obvious vehicles for expressing solidarity.

The poets I discuss, Chris Llewellyn and Diane Gilliam Fisher,⁶ have each written a collection of poems about a key

⁵Larry Smith delineates characteristics of Appalachian literature that are often shared by Appalachian culture. Among the more notable features of Appalachian writing are a deep appreciation of folk habits, customs, and rituals; an intimate sense of community, strong and physically intense religious beliefs, and rebellion when family or land is threatened. Smith's list of characteristics of Appalachian literature follows a list of characteristics of working-class literature. He clarifies that he is not naming criteria.

⁶Chris Llewellyn's *Fragments from the Fire* received the 1986 Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets. Diane Gilliam Fisher's *Kettle Bottom* was the summer reading choice at Smith College in 2007. Fisher's book was also a Top Ten Poetry Pick of the American Bookseller's Association in 2005.

struggle in the Labor Movement. Both Llewellyn's *Fragments from the Fire* (1987) and Fisher's *Kettle Bottom* (2004) represent events that occurred during the first two decades of the twentieth century. This was one of the peak immigration periods, with the American dream of economic opportunity and political and religious freedom drawing millions.⁷ In Llewellyn's and Fisher's work, the promise of the American dream is powerfully juxtaposed with the reality of exploitation and poverty that both immigrants and American-born citizens faced. Their work underscores common interests and pains among workers that readers can recognize and then envision the possibility of the workers joining forces. Each work is firmly based in the historical record, but takes imaginative liberties to create characters and voices.

Llewellyn and Fisher use literary techniques and forms—such as Biblical allusions, parallel structure, monologues, and elegies—to suggest the possibility of common interests among the working class. The writers represent the shared material conditions of working people by juxtaposing the lives of workers from different racial and ethnic groups and, through literary techniques, suggesting the commonality between different groups. Both texts are multivocal and heteroglossic. They also depict African Americans criticizing white racism in both the upper classes and in the working class. While it is certainly possible for writers to represent working-class people recognizing their commonalities across racial or ethnic lines,⁸ Llewellyn and Fisher stop short of depicting recognition of solidarity between working-class people of different ethnic or racial backgrounds.

Llewellyn's and Fisher's collections can be categorized as modern epics (as distinguished from classical ones). The genre of poetry itself creates some challenges for working-class writers, and the epic form is especially problematic. As Cary Nelson notes, poetry is often idealized. It is strongly associated with lyric and

⁷Immigration to the United States in the early twentieth century peaked in around 1905 at approximately 1.3 million. The numbers dropped during World War I and again climbed around 1920 to about 800,000. Since 1820, the peak in immigration has been in the late 1980s, at about 1.8 million (MPI Data Hub).

⁸In a work-in-progress I am examining the films *Frozen River* and *Gran Torino* that represent working-class people of different races recognizing their affinities and shared concerns.

thought to deal with personal angst more than social injustice.⁹ Poetry's perceived rarified status intensified in the early part of the twentieth century with the acclaim that T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound achieved. As Nelson notes and as any follower of the diverse worlds of Poetry Magazine and poetry slams knows, there are continuing questions as to what cultural territory American poetry will claim. These challenges to working-class poets are magnified by the additional ones of writing epic. The foremost critic on epic is M. M. Bakhtin. His analysis of the genre, while somewhat enlightening, is much more suited to classical and older European epics than to modern ones. He describes the epic as a genre whose evolution is not only complete, but antiquated. He further classifies epic past as an absolute past, one like the genre itself that is complete and finished; the past that Llewellyn and Fisher represent is usable and relevant. Yet some characteristics of the epic as described by Bakhtin are relevant to my study, notably the role of prophecy in the epic.¹⁰

In the introduction to his edited volume on the female epic, Bernard Schweitzer posits that the epic may be the most gender-coded of literary forms.¹¹ To advance his claim, he cites both Borges's statement that the epic hero is a man who is a hero for all men, and Virginia Woolf in "A Room of One's Own" saying that the epic would suit a woman no more than would a masculine sentence (1). For Llewellyn and Fisher, however, the epic is not an uneasy fit; the poets appropriate the genre to "tell the tale" of working-class communities. Drawing on Michael Bernstein's *The Tale of the Tribe* in his work on Sharon Doubiago's epic poetry, Jeremy Downes reviews some of the characteristics of epic verse. First, epics relate national, cultural, mythic, or historical narratives. They represent models of conduct to emulate or avoid. They also, as is particularly appropriate for working-class texts, represent not an individual voice, but a communal one. It is assumed that the epic's audience shares a culture and values, and that they

⁹Bourgeois novels do, of course, deal with individual concerns, as critics such as Barbara Foley have noted. However, there is a stronger novelistic tradition of novelists such as Charles Dickens, Leo Tolstoy, and Victor Hugo representing social concerns.

¹⁰See "Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel" for a discussion of these points.

¹¹Jenny Goodman also discusses the perceived maleness of the epic in her "Presumption and 'Unlearning': Reading Muriel Rukeyser's 'The Book of the Dead' as a Woman's Epic."

can be educated or enlightened through the text (186). These reflections on the modern American epic help to not only situate Llewellyn's and Fisher's epics, but also to explain the appropriateness of the genre for the story of the communities represented, including the diverse groups within the communities. An epic that includes multiethnic and multiracial representations of workers and underscores these workers' affinities advances a vision of solidarity among working-class people.

Fragments from the Fire

Chris Llewellyn's epic is based on the notorious Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire that occurred on March 25, 1911 in New York City. The details of this tragedy are familiar to anyone versed in labor history. Approximately five hundred workers, overwhelmingly female immigrants, were present when the fire broke out.¹² The factory bosses had locked the doors, possibly to keep put union organizers. Oil was essential to the machines' operation, and highly flammable oil-soaked rags were strewn over the floor. The building was, literally, a fire trap for the workers, although the bosses escaped unharmed. One hundred forty-six workers—129 women and 17 men—died, many jumping to their deaths in desperation to escape the fire.¹³ Some victims were only fourteen years old.

Llewellyn is one of several woman poets who have written poetry about the fire.¹⁴ Zandy in *Hands* hypothesizes that women

¹²Most sources agree that about 500 workers were present when the Triangle Fire occurred. Llewellyn concurs with this figure, as does the website "Remembering the Triangle Factory Fire" (Cornell University, ILR School). In her text *Sweatshop: The History of an American Idea*, Hapke puts the estimate much higher at 900. Sources, including the PBS documentary *The Triangle Fire* produced on the 100th anniversary of the tragedy, agree that 146 people died in the fire.

¹³My source is Berger's *New York Times* article, but these numbers are widely available.

¹⁴Other poets who have represented the Triangle Fire include Mary Fell, "The Triangle Fire," in *The Persistence of Memory*; Carol Tarlen, "Sisters in Flames" in *Women's Studies Quarterly*; Safiya Henderson-Holmes, "Rituals of Spring" in *Madness and a Bit of Hope*; Julia Stein, "Downtown Women" in *Zandy, Calling Home*. Paola Corso has poems about the Triangle Fire in her book *Once I Was Told the Air Was Not for Breathing*. For an overview of Fell's, Tarlen's, Henderson-Holmes's, and Stein's work, see Zandy's "An Essay about Triangle Fire Poetry" on the *Modern American Poetry* website as well as the section "Fire Poetry on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire" in *Zandy's Hands*.

poets have been drawn to this tragedy because it taps a collective memory of class oppression and injustice (125–126). Indeed, the story of the fire illustrates the interplay of class, gender, and ethnicity. In discussing how she came to write this epic, Llewellyn says: “Being so moved by [the workers’] real-life stories, I needed to retell the Triangle Fire in my own way as a poet, not as a historian or scholar. I aspired toward the emotional truth in this retelling of the stories of the victims, witnesses, and survivors” (Hands 137). Llewellyn’s emotional truth is the imaginative truth of the experience of the fire—including the deaths of victims, the agony of survivors, and the common struggles that immigrant women from different ethnic groups shared. This truth is presented in a carefully structured multivocal text that includes the poet’s own responses to the tragedy.

Fragments from the Fire is broken into five sections, each of which is preceded by a Biblical quote. Four of these quotes allude to cloth or garments; for example, the first from Isaiah 61 refers to “the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” and the last from John 6 reads “Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.” These quotes not only evoke the Triangle Factory and the material it produces, but also evoke the writer’s use of the fragments of information about the fire. In “Under Construction: Working-Class Writing” Paul Lauter discusses the praxis implicit in working-class writing, arguing that “just as poor peasant societies create a cuisine that uses every scrap of animal or plant for food, so working-class writers use whatever opportunities present themselves to pursue the issues of class conflict, the oppression of labor . . . and other concerns” (76). While the story of the Triangle Fire is well documented, the lives of individual workers and the appalling conditions in which they worked have been minimized. It is left to the working-class writer to harness these fragments of history to sensitize readers to use these realities.¹⁵

Llewellyn’s use of a quote from Isaiah to introduce the text illustrates how she situates the historically specific Triangle Fire in a tradition of poetic prophecy. Bakhtin has asserted: “Prophecy is characteristic for the epic, prediction for the novel. Epic prophecy is realized wholly within the limits of the absolute past (if not in a

¹⁵Lauter notes that writers may have a variety of motivations: from stirring people to job action, to advocating socialism, to validating the lives of neglected people. Working-class writers are not any more monolithic than other writers in their goals and visions.

given epic, then within the limits of the tradition it encompasses); it does not touch the reader and his [sic] real time" (31). *Fragments from the Fire*, however, is a modern epic, and thus it and the prophecies it evokes occur not in the absolute past, but in the re-envisioned or living past. The historical episode Llewellyn represents will reverberate in the future, and readers themselves will experience this reverberation.

The inclusion of epigraphs from both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament also links the religious beliefs of the Italian and Jewish fire victims and emphasizes their commonalities. Both Jews and Christians recognize the Hebrew Bible, albeit in different forms. This point is especially important when we consider that Jews were often Othered and sometimes thought to have mysterious religious practices. The quote from extends the fragment imagery and prophetic undertones expressed in the Hebrew Bible, further strengthening connections between Judaism and Christianity.¹⁶ The volume's coda, however, goes beyond making connections between these workers' ethnic and religious boundaries and suggests both an international solidarity and lasting resonance of the fire. "The Day When Mountains Moved," a tanka, was written by Yosano Ariko, a Japanese activist and feminist, in 1911, the year of the Triangle Fire. Because it so resonates, I quote the poem in its entirety:

The Day When Mountains Moved

The mountain-moving day is coming.
I say so, yet others doubt.
Only awhile a mountain sleeps.
In the past
All mountains moved in fire
Yet you may not believe it.
Oh man, this alone believe
All sleeping women now will
awake and move.

¹⁶The three other quotes from the Hebrew Bible that, respectively, mark the second, third, and fourth sections of the book are: "O Lord my God, thou art very great! / Thou art clothed with honor and majesty, / who coverest thyself with light as a garment, / who stretchest out the heavens / like a curtain." Psalm 104:1, 2; "I made sackcloth also my garment; and I became a proverb to them." Psalm 69:11; "The children which thou shalt have / after thou has lost the others / shall say again in thy ears: / The place is too strait for me; / give place to me that / I may dwell." Isaiah 49:20.

Like previously discussed epigraphs, this coda has prophetic undertones. It foretells a time when "sleeping women" will rise. Ethnic workers in the United States will not only recognize their common condition, but they will also recognize their solidarity with women workers around the world. This recognition will mitigate against feelings of isolation and helplessness,¹⁷ suggesting that the voices of the Triangle victims and of contemporary women will be heard. The context of *Fragments from the Fire* clearly indicates that these are working-class women.

The first and crucial poem, "March 25, 1911," expresses commonality among Triangle victims. It begins: "It was Spring. It was Saturday. / Payday. For some it was Sabbath. / Soon it will be Easter. It was / approaching April, nearing Passover. / It was close to closing time" (4). Variations on these lines are alternately repeated at the end of the next twenty-seven stanzas, juxtaposed with the narrative of the fire. These lines serve both to slow down the narrative and to emphasize its important theme of the hope of renewal—both religious in the form of holy days and secular in the hope of the American Dream that brought immigrants to the United States. References to spring, Passover, and Easter all suggest times of renewal and triumph over death while the words "payday" and "closing time" emphasize the small, necessary compensation for laborious work. Juxtaposing these words underscores the gap between the grand dreams immigrants have of a better life and the brutal, unceasing reality of life as wage slaves in the garment factory. While immigrants may come to the United States with dreams of self-sufficiency and comfort, they learn to settle for brief periods of respite provided at the close of workdays and on weekends. Moreover, the state of immigration debates at the beginning of the twentieth century indicates that both Jewish and Italian women were very much what David Roediger refers to as "inbetween" immigrants: immigrants from southern and eastern Europe who did not enjoy full inclusion in American society. Jews were particularly marginalized because of religion, Italians because they were "swarthy."¹⁸

¹⁷The worldwide occupy movements might be seen as a fulfillment of this prophecy.

¹⁸See Roediger's *Working Toward Whiteness* for a discussion of attitudes toward white immigrants from eastern and southern Europe.

The poem further collapses distinctions between Jewish and Italian immigrants, with lines such as “. . . I heard them yelling / in Yiddish or Italian. . .” (6). Its final stanza combines Hebrew Biblical and New Testament allusions with an image of desperate solidarity that may suggest how the workers’ lives are always intertwined:

The Lord is my shepherd
 green pastures still
 waters anointest heads
 with oil overflowing
 preparest a table—now
 our arms around each other
 we thread the needle where
 no rich man can go spinning
 the earth’s axle we are
 leaving in light. (9)

The poem’s final lines evoke the words from Matthew 19:24: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” The lines also suggest that no rich person will go where the needle is; in other words, no person would endure the conditions that produce his/her wealth.

While *Fragments from the Fire*’s primary focus is on the fire itself, “March 25, 1911” also references popular culture and mentions Al Jolson, one of the era’s most popular blackface performers. This caricature of blackness brings to mind the actual black people who, like immigrants, are erased from standard historical narratives. However, the performance of blackness by white performers for primarily white working-class audiences had undeniably racial undertones. David Roediger argues that such performances reinforced the ideology that whiteness mattered, and that working whites could bond along the color lines (*Wages* 117).¹⁹ Al Jolson was Jewish, so his performance paradoxically enacted the possibility of white alliances against African Americans and affinities between Jews and African Americans.²⁰ It is worth noting that

¹⁹Roediger in *Working Toward Whiteness* also argues that the blackface performances in vaudeville and in silent films served as a form of miseducation for white immigrants who knew little English and had had little contact with African Americans (180).

²⁰See Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise* for an examination of blackface performances by Jews.

women are absent from this tradition and that the stakes around color are being negotiated by men.

Nonetheless, scholars of whiteness studies are quick to note that while immigrants were an "in between" not-quite-white group, they never suffered the "hard" discrimination the people of color did (*Working 12*).²¹ There is no white ethnic equivalent for the Indian Removal, Jim Crow Laws, or Japanese Americans's internment. Moreover, while history condemned the Jim Crow south, the harshness of the prejudice that African Americans experienced in other parts of the country was downplayed or erased. In Llewellyn's "Potter's Field," such erasure is represented. Its narrator, Thomas Horton, an elevator operator, was the only African American to testify at the trial of the Triangle bosses. Yet he was referred to in newspaper accounts only as "Heroic Elevator Man," never named. At first glance, it might seem that this poem is Horton's chance to voice his identity and his story. However, a close reading suggests that his voice is again squelched. Horton states that the potter's field was transformed into Washington Square Park when the upper class moved in and bitterly remarks that President Washington once sold a slave for a bale of cotton. Then, he cuts off his narrative, "... But you want to hear about the fire." (52) We are left to reflect upon his absent voice and his imperative to tell the story that readers want to hear.

As Zandy has noted, Llewellyn's poem is crowded with voices and multivocal (*Hands 139*). The discourse would be described in Bakhtinian terms as dialogic, although he would not have envisioned the epic's discourse as such; rather Bakhtin saw all poetic discourse, in contrast to novelistic, as monologic. Bakhtin's evaluation emphasizes how closely poetry is associated with the singular vision of the poet and, in the lyric, is identified with the singular voice of the poet. Llewellyn, however, sees her task differently. It is imperative that these many voices be represented to counter the dominant voice in disparaging workers as uncivilized creatures. Such negative views of the workers are reflected in "March 25, 1911" in the callous refusal of a boss to have fire drills in factories,

²¹For other texts on whiteness studies see Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks* and George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.

"Let em burn. They're/ a lot of cattle anyhow." (7). This picture of the workers, was, unfortunately, reinscribed even in their deaths, for as they desperately leapt from windows, their bodies were described as bales of cloth (Hapke 51).²²

In order to emphasize the workers' unique individual identities, Llewellyn represents their various voices. She also chooses to name the victims in "Survivor's Cento." Depicting family members identifying bodies by specific articles of clothing or hairstyles, the poem actually underscores the victims' ethnic diversity as it mourns their common fate: "Freda Velakowski, Ignatzia Bellota, Celia Eisenberg. . . . Jennie Franco, / Julia Aberstein, Joseph Wilson, Nicolina Nicolese" (37). The efforts of this poem are made all the more poignant by the poem that precedes it, "Funeral for the Nameless," which commemorates those whose bodies could not be identified or claimed, and thus are buried only with identifying numerals such as 46 or 127.

In addition to the poems that name specific workers, the epic's inclusion of seven pictures helps to literally put faces on the victims. Interspersed with the poems, these photographs bring to light both the reality of the event and the poet's imaginative recreation of it. "Trade Union Procession for the Fire Victims," for example, depicts the rain frequently mentioned in Llewellyn's poems. These photographs then offer readers a visual glimpse into the historical past and help readers to construct their own interpretations of the fire. Thus unlike the absolute past of the traditional epic, Llewellyn's poem creates a living past.

Visual representations are also important because fashion is about appearances, and the Triangle workers were making fashionable clothing. "Grand Street," the appellation itself rich with symbolism, tells of a young girl who defied her father in leaving her block to go to Grand Street in order to look at dolls in "real silk and lace," with "brass-bound trunks for travel" (47). The poem's final line, a powerful understatement, suggests the child's emotions as she realizes one doll is wearing a shirtwaist, "The kind

²²On 9/11 many victims trapped in the Twin Towers also leapt to their deaths. It is striking that they were never described as undifferentiated masses, but that their individuality was respected. The New York Times ran a series of portraits profiling every person killed in the attacks on the Towers. The difference in the representation of Triangle Fire and 9/11 victims is undoubtedly attributable both to class differences and deaths resulting from foreign attack as opposed to deaths resulting from domestic negligence.

[of dresses] Mama made at Triangle. Back before the Fire" (47). What is almost as poignant, however, is that the girl enviously views the blue-eyed and blond-haired dolls, much as Pecola in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* craves blue eyes. Blue eyes and blond hair are not characteristic of either Jewish or southern Italian women; yet "Grand Street" hints at these ethnic groups' common outsider status and the unfortunate likelihood that their children desire the perceived beauty and material privileges that the upper classes enjoy.

Fragments from the Fire certainly commemorates the past and honors the dead, but Llewellyn also wrote to enlighten her contemporaries and future generations. Her task is particularly noteworthy since her book was published in 1986 during the height of the Reagan years when labor unions were being eviscerated, especially by Reagan's firing the air traffic controllers who went on strike in 1981. In "Stadium Sestina," Llewellyn describes her memories of delivering a talk at her high school graduation while she was researching the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire. Implicitly, the poem ponders how her contemporaries, two generations removed from the Triangle Fire, will receive the "torch" symbolically passed on by their elders, and suggests that Llewellyn's writing this poem is one sign that she has taken up this torch.

The image of a stadium brings to mind a large space for sports or celebratory events, but one that, because of the number of people in it, has the potential for danger.

Hence, it is perhaps not surprising that Llewellyn reflects on those who embraced danger for a better life, and, even more so than in some earlier poems, reflects on the ethnic diversity of the immigrants: "From Europe, Italy, Jamaica, Palestine, Russia. . . Each wage-earner singed an 'X' or Arabic-Cyrillic-Hebrew script" (63) The toil of this generation is continually juxtaposed with the media coverage of progress in the businesses of Ford Motors, Union Carbide, and the First National Bank, leaving the narrator, and implicitly the readers, to sort out the legacy.

Fragments from the Fire has been characterized by Zandy as a poem written out of affiliation rather than filiation; that is, Llewellyn does not have any direct connection to the fire victims, nor is she of Italian or Russian-Jewish ancestry—the two ethnic groups most represented among the factory workforce. Rather, she "moves beyond her personal identity of race and ethnicity,

her own geography, and her own employment to embrace—metaphorically—the women of the Triangle fire” (Hands 138). This action is perhaps the most important act of solidarity across ethnic lines, for Llewellyn, never a factory worker, is claiming the tragedy of the Triangle Factory victims as a national tragedy, affiliating with them as workers and as women. She does so while respecting and representing their ethnic and religious specificities, for not to do so would again erase the victims as individuals. While Llewellyn’s text creates historical figures, speaks for a people, and hopes to enlighten readers who share common values, it does not present the women as characters to be valorized. The women are victims, and the onus is on the factory owners and officials who devalue workers’ lives still.

Kettle Bottom

Diane Gilliam Fisher’s parents were part of the Appalachian outmigration; from Mingo County, West Virginia and Johnson County, Kentucky. Fisher grew up in central Ohio; she had never lived in Appalachia, but this area was always home to her. This apparent paradox can be understood in light of Appalachians’ relationship to their land and their community. As novels such as Harriette Arnow’s *The Doll Maker* (1954) and Grace Lumpkin’s *To Make My Bread* (1932) show, the land itself is highly prized, as is one’s particular community. To introduce his list of characteristics of Appalachian working-class writing, Larry Smith includes an epigraph from a film titled *The Appalachians*: “A land shaped by the people. A people shaped by the land.” Smith further notes that geographical mobility to achieve upward mobility is not valued; rather than becoming educated in order to leave the community, the ideal is to return to the community after becoming educated. In Smith’s words, Appalachians are “stayputters” and “grounded” rather than mobile. With such values in place, some of those who participated in the outmigration undoubtedly felt like exiles and tried to return, if only through words, as Fisher did.²³ Yet I argue that Fisher also writes out of affiliation, not only filiation that is

²³Diane Gilliam Fisher received her MFA at Warren Wilson College. She told me that one of the reasons she chose this school was because she wanted to be in the Appalachian Mountains.

associated with identity politics. She identifies not only with native-born white West Virginians, presumably of Scots Irish background, but also with immigrants and African-Americans to whom her epic poem, *Kettle Bottom*, published in 2004, gives voice.

As Fisher explains in her "Author's Note," the West Virginia mine wars of 1920–1921 grew out of decades-long exploitation.²⁴ (They also grew out of earlier armed confrontations.) Similar to the owners of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, the mine owners in southwestern West Virginia (Mingo County) blocked workers' attempts to unionize, particularly through the employment of the cut-throat Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency. When agents attempted to turn out families (all housing, stores, schools, and churches were controlled by the mine owners), violence erupted into what became known as the Mattawan Massacre. Fighting continued, and thousands of miners were killed. When President Harding called in federal troops, however, the miners, many of whom had served in the military in World War I, were reluctant to fight the American army. Peace was achieved, and shortly afterward the United Mine Workers' Union organized miners working in southern West Virginia mines. However, the lives of coal miners and their families remained extremely difficult (1).

Historians and literary critics have begun to critique the picture of Appalachia in popular culture as monolithically white and native born and to reveal the heterogeneous nature of the region in the early twentieth century. Mary K. Anglin argues that the development of the coal mining industry required a multiethnic, even multinational workforce. She also draws on Henry Louis Gates's autobiographical *Colored People*, which describes both alliances between African Americans and other ethnic groups in West Virginia and the necessity for African Americans in the Jim Crow era to learn to navigate an area in which whites were the majority. The West Virginia Division of Culture and History's website states that in the early twentieth century thousands of immigrants headed for southern West Virginia and a large number of blacks migrated to the area. In McDowell County, African Americans comprised 0.1% of the total population in 1880, 30.7% in 1910. Fisher's poetry reflects the variety of cultures living

²⁴The West Virginia Coal Mining Wars are also the subject of Denise Giardina's acclaimed 1987 novel *Storming Heaven*.

in southwest West Virginia: it includes Italian immigrants and African-American workers as well as native West Virginians. Her poems represent extreme suffering resulting from exploitation among all groups, but acknowledge the advantages that the native West Virginians have due to community affiliation, command of English, and whiteness.

Fisher holds a doctorate in Romance Languages and is thus highly attuned to the role of languages in representing and indeed creating reality. The variety of poems in Appalachian dialect, African-American dialect, and the English of Italian immigrants represents a patchwork of the West Virginia landscape that belies monolithic depictions. Appalachian dialect is a mutation of standard English; African-American speech is a combination of English words with African grammar and inflections, and the Italian included is actually a combination of Italian and English, what some might call ItalEnglish, a pattern of speech quite common among immigrants. As Sheryl Stevenson argues, the linguistic variations illustrate Homi Bhabha's hybridity, a theory that deconstructs self/other formulations and reveals overlapping rather than distinct cultures. Moreover, all of these dialects result from the characters' marginal and, in the case of African and Italian Americans, diasporic status within American culture.

As in *Fragments from the Fire*, the structuring apparatus for *Kettle Bottom* is important, beginning with the allusion to Muriel Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead*. This collection of twenty-one poems represents the nation's worst industrial disaster. In the early 1930s, approximately 1,500 tunnel workers, overwhelmingly African Americans, who came to Gauley Bridge, West Virginia to find work, were exposed to dangerously high levels of silica because their employer, Union Carbide, neglected basic safety procedures, notably providing the workers with masks. At least 500 workers died of silicosis; estimates range as high as 2,000 ("1500 Doomed," Thurston 60).

The epigraph taken from the poem "Gauley Bridge," in Muriel Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead*, performs complex work in signaling affiliation and literary heritage. It reads: "What do you want—a cliff over a city? / A foreland, sloped to sea and overgrown with roses? / These people live here." In the tradition of documentary photography, Rukeyser focuses on the picture of people's lives and cautions readers that they will find not

the romanticized vistas of panoramic landscapes, but rather the actual conditions in which ordinary people live. With her epigraph Fisher aligns herself with a foremother in labor poetry, who also wrote about West Virginia. Implicitly, Fisher acknowledges that as bad as work conditions were for white workers, racism made African Americans more disposable. Rukeyser's words also alert readers to the fact that they will "see" the actual, often appalling, living and working conditions of the people who live in Mingo County.

Kettle Bottom's three sections—Summer-Fall, Raven Light, and Winter-Summer—signal temporal changes and radical shocks to the rhythms of everyday life. The first and third sections place the Coal Mining Wars in their seasonal context, and highlight in what a short time period so much turmoil occurred. The second section, "Raven Light," is in the voice of Nathan Stokes who is sealed in the mine and slowly dying. The raven evokes the blackness of working coal miners, but is also an allusion to the story of Noah's ark in which after the flood, before sending out the more delicate dove, Noah sent out a raven. The raven stayed out for short periods of time, and then returned to the boat. Similar to the canary in the coal mine, however, Stokes will not return; his being sealed in is not only a personal tragedy, but a turning point for the community.

As is typical for epic poetry, the poems in *Kettle Bottom* concern history as well as prophecy. Because men so often die or become incapacitated in the mines, women and children bear witness and serve as repositories of memory. "What History Means to Me," purportedly about a student assignment, represents the children's interpretations of a history of exploitation. One student, Gladdie Beecham, interviews her Aunt Mandy, the oldest living person in the town, and hears, "First the railroads come and lots of fancy pants forriners trying to buy up every little creek and holler. . . . Then the timber men come, took the oak and yellow poplar, wrecked the rivers and left" (70).²⁵ In these lines greed is represented by the purchase and destruction of the land itself; the destruction of its people soon follows.

²⁵For background on some of the events to which Aunt Mandy refers see texts by R. L. Lewis and Barbara Rasmussen.

Within the Appalachian mining community, bonds between women were tight, as families often helped one another in need and women were often acutely aware of which families were suffering. The poem "Milk" exemplifies this spirit, as the narrator's mother regularly supplied milk to Burns Cantrell's family, who had a baby during the strike. During the mining wars such assistance was compromised. Another student, Pearlie Webb, reveals that Ory Price died in childbirth because Marshall Law had been declared, and the Baldwin-Felts agents would not let anyone into the camp. However, it is noteworthy that in addition to the white granny who tried to assist Ory, "Woman come down from Colored row to try to help" (70). This line suggests both the way these women crossed race lines in an attempt to assist a woman in need and the shameful fact that African Americans were segregated within the miners' living quarters, locked in a hell within a hell.

The poems in this collection representing African Americans—"At the Colored Bathhouse," "Ironing," "Samson," and "Good Man in the Mines"—critique racism. While African Americans are rarely depicted in pictures of miners, they have, in fact, long had a presence in the industry. African Americans had worked in the mines in Virginia as early as the 1700s (as slaves). Given the difficulty of earning a living as sharecroppers in the Jim Crow South, some turned to the mines in the hopes of economic advancement. Some sources estimate that in 1910 over 40,500 African Americans were performing work associated with the mines, and approximately 29,000 were miners (Pinnick). "At the Colored Bathhouse" sneers at the inability of white miners to see fellow workers in African Americans, "We colored here, for some. For some, niggers / and scabs—it twist a face the same" (16). The fire boss (one who first entered the mine to make sure it was safe) habitually entered this bathhouse and laughed at the empty pants hanging on chains in an eerie reference to lynching: "String 'em up, boys. That's the way!" The female speaker in "Ironing" expresses her anger at racism when she refers to all of the chores she does stating "I ain't white," suggesting both that she may have additional chores because of her race and evoking the popular African American sentiment that white people have easy lives. She further refers to dealing with the "... old

goat-bellied storekeeper / cutting his eyes at me ever which way" (31), emphasizing the racism of company storeowners.

"Samson," an obvious retelling of the Biblical story, represents African-American anger at being "called out of name" by whites who cannot acknowledge African-American subjectivity. Such anger is memorably depicted in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* when the protagonist Maya, working as a domestic, is infuriated by her employer's announcement that the name "Maya" is too difficult, so she will be called "Mary." In retaliation, Maya drops one of her employer's prize dinner pieces. In "Samson" the African-American narrator has, apparently for years, not been acknowledged by name. He is addressed as "son" and described by the Boss to the Big Boss in Boston as a "colored boy." One of Samson's jobs is to move the pillars, the "walls of coal you leave / between rooms while you working / the rooms" (79). This dangerous work was likely reserved for African Americans. As the poem "Good Man in the Mines" suggests and as Ronald Lewis notes, it was a common practice to assign African Americans the most dangerous jobs in the mines (ctd. in Anglin 76). Indeed, Samson lost one eye when coal shot out at it while he was pillar-drawing, yet the mine bosses, seeing him as a beast of burden, do not bother to ask how his "eye got gone" (79). As does the Biblical Samson, Samson in this poem gets his revenge. He blocks the exit from the room and then pushes each pillar, "To the mountain, we all the same. / I pressed harder, and I told them my name" (79). Like the Philistines in the Biblical story, the Boss has not understood the source of Samson's strength or the depths of his anger. Neither have the white miners.

While the white characters in *Kettle Bottom* do not acknowledge their racism, the text does, as it represents African-American work, actions, and feelings. The isolation of African-American workers is particularly striking given the intimate sense of community and interdependence of individuals within it that *Kettle Bottom* manifests and that is indeed characteristic of Appalachian working-class writing (Smith). The text indicts racism without minimizing the struggle white West Virginians faced; whites can be oppressed and still be complicit in the oppression of others.

The Italian immigrants are more understandably outsiders, as they have very recently arrived in the country. While they do

not suffer "hard racism" as African Americans do, they do suffer from the "in-between status" that Roediger applies to immigrants from southern and eastern Europe in the early twentieth century (*Working* 12).²⁶ Southern Italians' darker complexions and curly hair marginalized them even in Italy. Northern Italians had for years had a saying "Africa begins at Rome." In *Kettle Bottom* local people's xenophobia is represented in "Fortune," in which the Italian-American woman who wears big earrings is mistaken for a fortuneteller and the women, fearing her knowledge, "walk wide / past [my] door" (39).

The Italian immigrants also suffer linguistic isolation and a resultant marginality in the community. Fisher's poems about Italian Americans express a tension between the immigrants' limited English and consequent misunderstanding, and their Cassandra-like ability to envision the dangers of mining. In "L'Inglese" the narrator, who loves his country's poets Tasso and Dante, equates the difficulty of the English language with the coal industry itself, "so many hard sounds they batter the tongue / like coal clattering from the tippie / into the railroad car" (8). Yet the immigrant quickly translates the figurative meaning of the feared kettle bottom, a chunk of petrified tree that may weigh up to three hundred pounds and is buried in the mountain roof. If it falls, it instantly kills all in its path. "Kettle bottom," does not express the nature of this menace; the narrator turns to words from Dante's *Inferno*, "Leave behind all hope, Ye who enter here." These words apply to all who work in the mines.

The poem "David" underscores the difference in values between the immigrants and the mine bosses, including in their appreciation of art. Because he sees it as "a land of beautiful buildings still / hiding in the stones," (82) an Italian master stonecutter decides to come to America. Unable to speak English and name his trade, he gestures "the motion of hitting the stone," (82) and is mistakenly sent to the mines. While this assignment is partially an understandable misinterpretation of the stonecutter's gesture, it may also result from stereotyping Italians as brute laborers. Henry Pratt Fairchild, a eugenicist writing in 1911, illuminates the biases against immigrants: "There is much similarity between the case of

²⁶Roediger builds on the work of David Orsi for the concepts of "hard racism" and "in-between status."

the negroes and that of the modern immigrants. To be sure, the newcomers of today are for the most part white-skinned instead of colored, which gives a different aspect to the matter. Yet in the mind of the average American, the modern immigrants are generally regarded as inferior peoples—races he looks down upon, and with which he does not want to associate in terms of social equality” (qtd. in Roediger, *Working* 133). In addition to the likelihood of prejudice, it is also possible that coal miners were more in demand than skilled artisans, and thus the stonecutter, who could not protest, was steered toward the mines.

None of the immigrants (or American-born miners) was brutish enough to unfeelingly take the mine’s abuses, as the poem “Samson” graphically illustrates. However, the experience of mining would be different for a skilled craftsman who was inexperienced in manual labor. Having exhausted his financial reserves, however, the protagonist in “David” has no recourse but to work in the mines. When he is “sealed in” by an accident, the company men say it is too dangerous to retrieve his body. The narrator, his child, tells us “The rich men here, they see nothing / in the stone but money. . . . No Michelangelo / here to cut the stone away from the beautiful men” (83).

The behavior of wealthy capitalists in these lines contrasts with that of the wealthy in Italy who respected the man and his art: “. . . Rich men / they knock on our door, asking licenza to enter our house, to talk with Papa / about a portico or a piazza” (82). This contrast emphasizes that it is not wealth itself that is the problem—Michelangelo was supported by wealthy patrons—but greed that puts no value in art or human life if it cannot turn a profit.

The particular horror of the kettle bottom and of the mines in general, which has been naturalized to some degree among miners from the area, is underscored by the speaker in “L’Inglese.” In its treatment of a hapless stonecutter’s death from a cave in, “David” raises questions about stereotypes of immigrants and American capitalist values. These poems in the voices of Italian immigrants thus provide insights of outsiders within, of those who operate on the margins of the mining community and thus able to grasp crucial truths about it.²⁷

²⁷For a discussion of the outsider within, see Patricia Hill Collins’s work.

Although the workers are not depicted uniting across racial and ethnic lines (the native white workers are certainly united), the final poem hints at some crucial changes in people's sensibilities. "The Mother Has Her Say" is narrated by a woman whose thirteen-year-old son is killed by black damp in the mine. The poem's title alludes to the fact that she was not heard when she spoke to her husband about the peril of the mine for a young boy. ("I told him, I told him, / don't matter Danny's big and tall for thirteen, / he got the sense of a boy, not a man"[85]). Moreover, while the mother does speak words, her statement is made primarily by boycott; she refuses to attend her son's funeral. In explaining her decision, she says, "... Don't need / to go sing about some faraway home. / Ain't I already living in a land / where a boy can't never grow old?" (85). Her own mother tries to "shame" her into attending the funeral, which would uphold the community norms for grieving and suggest she took some comfort in religion. The mother, however, turns the promise of agelessness in the hymn to a sharp commentary on mortality in the dangerous coal fields.²⁸

Certainly this poem depicts the mother's cynicism, but it also expresses what Tom Wayman calls "internal realism," a stance that, rather than imagining a spiritual heaven or worker's paradise brought about by socialism, focuses on the realities of workers' lives (40). Given the importance of religious institutions in Appalachia, as well as their often-vexing allegiance with the mining companies that employed the ministers, it is telling that the last poem in the volume suggests that a new vision is forming—one that holds religious institutions as complicit in the crimes of the mining community. As "The Day When Mountains Moved" foretells change in *Fragments from the Fire*, so does "The Mother Has Her Say" in *Kettle Bottom*.

Because the miners and their families were, unlike the women in *Fragments from the Fire*, engaged in an ongoing struggle, their actions are both admirable and emblematic of the divided loyalties that working-class people experience. "Dear Mr. President" represents the courage of the miners at Blair Mountain who will be attacked by the United States military if they do not

²⁸The lines from the hymn that appear at the beginning of the poem are: "I have heard of a land, on a faraway strand, / It's a beautiful home of the soul, / Built by Jesus on high, where we never shall die, / It's a land where we never grow old" (85).

surrender. Rather than fight the army of their own nation—with which many had fought in World War I—the men surrendered. Some labor historians and critics might argue that this was the wrong choice. Nonetheless, the narrator's words make it clear they did not retreat out of fear: "A lot of us down here has been to the War, / and all of us has been in the mines. You can kill us, Mr. President, / we all know that. But what in the world / makes you think you can scare us" (72).²⁹ The miners' stand and ultimate retreat on Blair Mountain illustrates that, like other hyphenated identities, "working class" and "American" can be filled with conflict.

Epic Vision

Kettle Bottom does not resolve the racial inequality and ethnic tensions it depicts. The white characters within the poems never acknowledge the ethnic and racial divisions in the coal-mining community, but the text as a whole represents how all the inhabitants suffer exploitation and dehumanization. African-American critiques of racism further highlight how baseless and destructive divisions along racial and ethnic lines are, especially in the face of exploitation by powerful and wealthy mining companies. *Fragments from the Fire* more often underscores the commonalities between Jewish and Italian immigrants, although none of the characters in the poems acknowledges the erasure of African-American workers. In sum, the poems in each of these texts are written in affiliation and subtly suggest the common interests among workers. Both *Fragments from the Fire* and *Kettle Bottom* critique white racism by giving silenced African Americans a voice of protest. Neither epic depicts an explicit recognition of commonality among white workers from different ethnic groups, and

²⁹"Dear Mr. President" does not represent the miners' decision to stop fighting, but in her explanatory author's note Fisher states, "The miners, many of whom were World War I veterans, were convinced to return to their homes, at least partly because they were unwilling to fight against the armed forces they had so recently been part of" (2). The military, as the series *Band of Brothers* illustrates, is well known for cultivating group identity. Appalachians already have a strong sense of community with their neighbors and fellow workers, so this aspect of military service resonates with them. Some scholars and professionals argue that the military emphasis on group identity and behavior is one reason—along with the appalling lack of job opportunities in the region—that Appalachians continue to enlist at high rates (Crabtree et al.).

certainly not of white workers affiliating with African Americans. Each of these texts, however, represents a key struggle in labor history, and the role that the laborers and family members play in these struggles are crucial, if often overlooked. Working-class identity intersects with Jewish-American, Italian-American, African-American, and other identities; yet while working-class conditions are inflected by ethnic and racial identities, all working-class people in these poems are exploited.³⁰

In addition to representing the common interests of workers of diverse backgrounds, *Fragments from the Fire* and *Kettle Bottom* each carve out new territory for epic poetry. Not only are both texts written by women, but the vast majority of the poems in *Fragments from the Fire* are in women's voices, and a number of the poems in *Kettle Bottom* are as well. Epics traditionally tell of key battles and/or the foundation of a people; Llewellyn and Fisher claim the epic genre for common people and document key battles in labor history. Rather than being narrated with a monologic voice of authority, Llewellyn's and Fisher's texts are multivocal, revealing the variety of voices in each community and suggesting the underlying similarities between them even as their unique, individual differences are revealed. In "What Makes a Text Working Class?" Zandy names the collective nature of working class writing as well as the focus on suffering that results from economic oppression (*Hands* 90). Llewellyn and Fisher adapt the epic genre to depict the struggle of a people—workers and their families—against powerful forces and to suggest a nascent affiliation. The prophetic undertones in both volumes suggest inevitability in the workers' struggles, much as the Civil Rights song "We Shall Overcome" suggests certain triumph in the struggle for racial equality, an inevitability that is powerful and poignant as abuses in both the garment industry and in mining continue across the globe. Llewellyn and Fisher are not only skilled poets, but also visionaries who imagine and depict common bonds among working-class people who may see outsiders as Other. Enacting this vision in poetry is, perhaps, the first step toward envisioning solidarity across racial and ethnic groups in the United States' diverse working class. In the words of Lecercle, these poems are in intervention in the interpretation of labor history. The poems

³⁰See Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* for her theory on intersectionality.

do not only reflect the past, but they prod readers to envision the possibilities for working-class solidarity.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Michele Fazio for feedback on drafts of this article.

Works Cited

- Anglin, Mary K. "Erasures of the Past: Culture, Power, and Heterogeneity in Appalachia." *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 10.1/2 (2004): 73-84. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Web. 21 June 2010.
- Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1982. Print.
- Berger, Joseph. "100 Years Later, the Roll of the Dead in a Factory Fire is Complete." *New York Times*. 20 Feb 2011. Web. Accessed 14 July 2011.
- Brodin, Karen. *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1998. Print.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought*. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- _____. *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998. Print.
- Cornell University, ILR School, Kheel Center. "Remembering the Triangle Factory Fire." Web. Accessed 14 July 2011.
- Crabtree, Michael, Elizabeth Bennett, John Dowling, Mary E. Schaffer, Matthew McNally, and Tony Canzonieri. "Mental Health Status and Perceived Barriers to Seeking Treatment in Rural Appalachian Reserve Component Veterans." Panel. Celebrating Northern Appalachia Conference. California University of Pennsylvania. 11 April 2011.
- Downes, Jeremy M. "Against the Fathers' Amnesia: Sharon Doubiago, Hard Country, and Women's Epic." *Schweitzer*, 181-209. Print.
- Fell, Mary. *The Persistence of Memory*. New York: Random House, 1984. Print.
- Fisher, Diane Gilliam. *Kettle Bottom*. Florence, MA: Perugia P, 2004. Print.
- Foley, Barbara. *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1993. Print.
- Giardina, Denise. *Storming Heaven*. New York: Ivy Books (Random House), 1988. Print.
- Goodman, Jenny. "Presumption and 'Unlearning': Reading Muriel Rukeyser's 'The Book of The Dead' as a Woman's American Epic." *TSSL* 25.2 (Fall 2006): 267-89. *MLA Bibliography*. Web. 25 May 2014.
- Hapke, Laura. *Sweatshop: The History of an American Idea*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2004. Print.
- Henderson-Holmes, Safiya. *Rituals of Spring*. New York: Harlem River P, 1990. Print.
- History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web. "1500 Doomed: People's Press Reports on the Gauley Bridge Disaster." Google. 22 July 2011.

- Lauter, Paul. "Under Construction: Working-Class Writing." Russo and Linkon, 63-77. Print.
- Lecerle, Jean-Jacques. "Return to the Political." *PMLA* 125.4 (Oct. 2010): 916-919. Print.
- Lewis, R. L. *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1920*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1998. Print.
- Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998. Print.
- Llewellyn, Chris. *Fragments from the Fire: The Triangle Shirtwaist Company Fire of March 25, 1911*. New York: Viking, 1987. Print.
- Migration Policy Institute. *MPI Data Hub: Migration, Facts, Stats, and Maps*. n.d. Web. 8 July 2009.
- Nelson, Cary. *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989. Print.
- O'Brien, Erin E. *The Politics of Identity: Solidarity Building Among America's Working Poor*. Albany: SUNYP, 2009. Print.
- Pinnick, Tim. *Brief History of the African-American Mining Experience*. n.p. 25 Mar. 2004. Web. 13 July 2009.
- Rasmussen, Barbara. *Absentee Landowning and Exploitation in West Virginia, 1760-1920*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1994. Print.
- Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. New York: Verso, 1999 (1991). Print.
- _____. *Working Toward Whiteness: How American Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*. New York: Basic Books, 2005. Print.
- Rogin, Michael. *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*. Berkeley, U of California P, 1998. Print.
- Russo, John, and Sherry Lee Linkon. *New Working-Class Studies*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005. Print.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage P, 1994. Print.
- Schlozman, Kay Lehman, and Sidney Verba. *Insult to Injury: Unemployment, Class, and Political Response*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979. Print.
- Schweitzer, Bernard, ed. *Approaches to the Anglo and American Female Epic, 1621-1982*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate P, 2006. "Introduction," 1-16. Print.
- Smith, Larry. "Appalachian Working-Class Fiction." 6 September 2011. Web. 14 September 2011.
- Stein, Julia. "Industrial Music: Contemporary American Working-Class Poetry and Modernism." In *Zandy, What We Hold in Common*, 207-222. Print.
- Stevenson, Sheryl. "Postcolonial Appalachia: Bhabha, Bakhtin, and Diane Gilliam Fisher's *Kettle Bottom*." *The CEA Forum* (35.1): Winter/Spring 2006. n. pag. *MLA Bibliography*. Web. 7 July 2009.
- Tarlen, Carol. "Sisters in the Flames" in *Women's Studies Quarterly*. Special issue *Working-Class Studies*. Ed. Janet Zandy. Spring/Summer 1995.
- Thurston, Michael. "Documentary Modernism as Popular Front Poetics." *MLQ* 60.1 (March 1999): 59-83. Web.

- Tokarczyk, Michelle M., and Elizabeth A. Fay, eds. "Introduction." *Working-Class Women in the Academy: Laborers in the Knowledge Factory*. Amherst: U Massachusetts P, 1993. 3–24. Print.
- U of Illinois. *Modern American Poetry*. Zandy, Janet. "An Essay about Triangle Fire Poetry." Web. 14 July 2011.
- Wayman, Tom. *Inside Job: Essays on the New Work Writing*. Madeira Park, B.C. (Canada): Harbour Publishing, 1983. Print.
- West Virginia State Archives. "West Virginia's Mine Wars." West Virginia Division of Culture and History. 2010. Web. 5 July 2010.
- Wilson, William Julius. *The Bridge Over the Racial Divide: Rising Inequality and Coalitional Politics*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999. Print.
- Zandy, Janet. *Calling Home: Anthology of Working-Class Women's Writings*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1990. Print.
- _____. *Hands: Physical Labor, Class, and Cultural Work*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2004. Print.
- _____. ed. *What We Hold in Common: An Introduction to Working-Class Studies*. New York: The Feminist P, 2001. Print.
- Zweig, Michael. *The Working-Class Majority: America's Best-Kept Secret*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2001. Print.