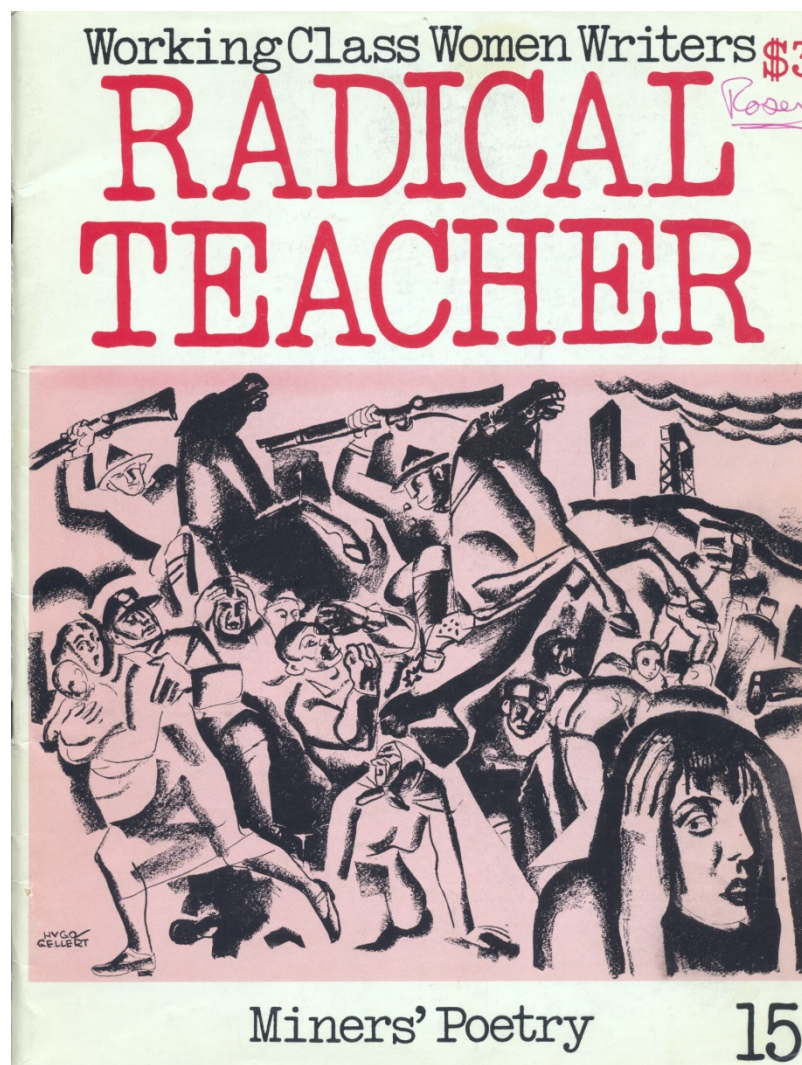


RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Poetry of the Colorado Miners: 1903-1906

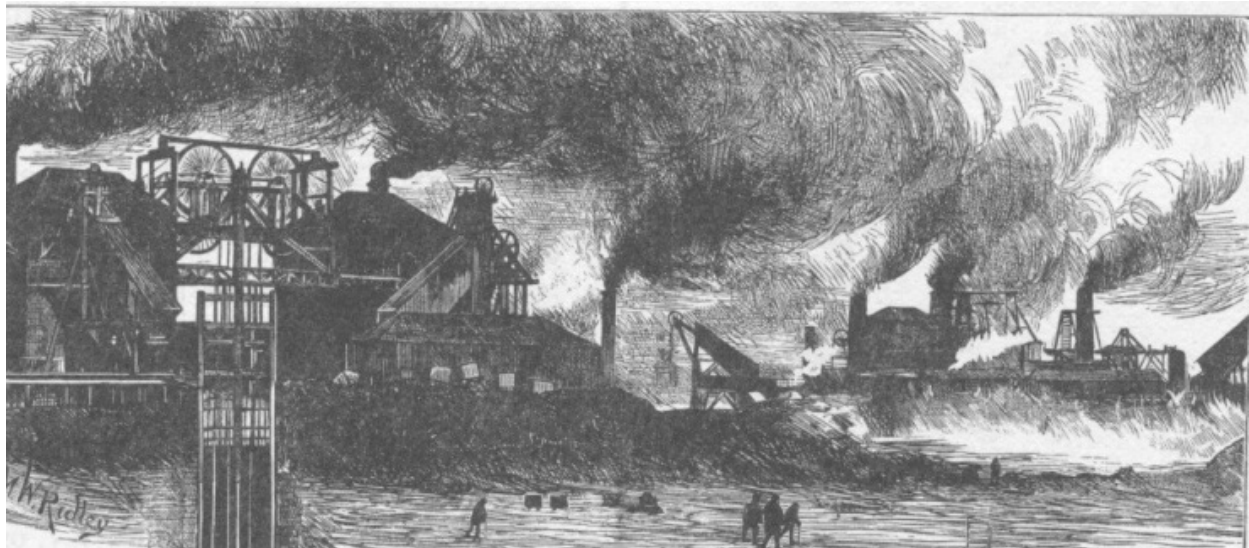
by Dan Tannacito



The poetry published in the *Miners Magazine* during the first decade of this century provides us with an illuminating case study of the characteristics and development of working-class literature in the United States. The creation of poetry by nonferrous metal miners in Colorado and surrounding areas illustrates the need for expression, affirmation, and communication on the part of the workers themselves and their allies during times of struggle.

The magazine, of which the poetry was a small part, was a vital tool in the organized resistance of the working class at the beginning of western industrialization. It was published weekly for the members of the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) and circulated on subscription to their friends as well as to other unions and union members. Responses to poems and contributions of poems from across the nation suggest that the miner poets stimulated feelings of readers who identified closely with the miners' cause.

The culture of the working class in the United States,



which the miner poetry illustrates, forms an important part of the total reality of American history and literature, yet a comprehensive view of that cultural reality is nearly absent from our educational institutions. The popularization of traditional working-class culture depends to a considerable extent on socially and historically conscious teachers of literature.¹ Among others, young writers in working-class situations can benefit from the history and literature of this tradition.² Quite possibly, when the traditional culture of the working class has been brought out of the darkness in which it has been shrouded, it may provide a useful, although not exclusive, basis for a new literature in the United States.

The poetry of the *Miners Magazine* was not the first such expression by the working class during the rise of industrialism in the United States. But the fact that the poetry was both reflective of and instrumental in conscious working-class struggle does indicate a relatively new phenomenon for the time. Upton Sinclair, a celebrated contemporary of the miner poets, indicated some of the

difficulty any writer of working-class life encounters when he remarked that:

*It is a kind of anguish that poets have not dealt with; its very words are not admitted into the vocabulary of poets – The details of it cannot be told in polite society at all. How, for instance, could anyone expect to excite sympathy among lovers of good literature by telling how a family found their home alive with vermin, and of all the suffering and inconvenience and humiliation they were put to, and the hard-earned money they spent, in efforts to get rid of them?*³

Yet unlike Sinclair's work, which spread beyond its initial proletarian audience, the literature of most working-class poets – and specifically that of the Colorado miners – has never been republished since its original appearance in the *Miners Magazine*. Because of the systematic exclusion of working-class poetry from the mechanisms (the popular magazines, scholarly journals, textbooks, and school

curricula) by means of which the received culture reproduces itself, the tradition of American poetry as well as the history of working-class culture in the United States has been seriously distorted for generations of young people. Until very recently, scholars – especially in the literary profession – have done little to rectify this. At best, working-class poetry has been treated as documentary evidence by historians and literary critics. At worst, the literature is regarded as "mere propaganda."⁴ Perhaps the most common attitude is reflected in the remark: "Workers don't write poetry; poets write poetry." Of course, this response is drawn from the myth that characterizes workers as mute creatures shoveling ore, while another, articulate class thinks and feels for society as a whole. But the historical reality is that workers, like the Colorado miners, wrote poetry in order to share and express their feelings about their experiences as a class. They were creators of their culture as well as creators of the wealth of their society. Yet neither the labor of their mining nor the labor of their poetry has received due recognition.

The exclusion of working-class poetry from the reproduction of American culture has its virtues as well. For the poems by the Colorado miners were not objects written for the market from which the writers derived their livelihood. Hence, they avoided the customary fate of


the immediate use made of it by its local audience of miners and sympathizers. By means of these poems the worker poets formed an intensified relationship with their worker audience that is not characteristic of twentieth-century poetry in the received canon. The miners shared an unalienated social poetry; that is, a poetry of commitment, communication, and concreteness.

The poetry of the Colorado miners contributed to the mining community's definition of its common life, work, and goals. All the poems were written during one of the most violent and significant episodes in United States labor history. "In Colorado between 1893 and 1897," Melvyn Dubofsky writes, "3,057 new mining corporations were organized, each capitalized at over \$1 million. New Yorkers and Chicagoans, Englishmen and Scotsmen poured their funds into the American West."⁵ As a consequence, within a decade Cripple Creek grew from a virtual frontier town to a "modern productive center."⁶ The strikes of 1893 provided the impetus for the organization of the mines. Moreover, the strength of a rapidly expanding and increasingly concentrated industry created such an intense situation that WFM President Charles Moyer felt that, "We are being attacked on all sides by the Mill Trust and Mine Owners' Association."⁷ Labor militance was the response to the situation. "The union grew in members and power," Emma F. Langdon (one of the labor writers at Cripple Creek) reported in 1903, until "the organization embrace[d] between 150,000 to 200,000 with a substantial treasury."⁸

The bitter Cripple Creek strike of 1903-04 was precipitated by the implacable opposition of the mill owners to the WFM's attempt to organize the Portland, Telluride, and Standard processing mills. The WFM had stopped the supply of ore to the mills from the mines which had already been organized. The employers decided to muster all their economic and political strength to break the union. They used scabs, provocateurs, agents; they deported and "vagged" workers; they organized so-called "Citizen Alliances" of local businessmen and petty officials. Not satisfied with this repertoire of strikebreaking tactics, the owners enlisted Governor James Peabody, one of the most anti-labor governors of the decade. Peabody declared martial law and sent Colorado's militia to the region. As historian Vernon Jensen tells us, "The military leaders were from the first in the closest sympathy with the mine owners, and the efforts of the troops were devoted not so much to the simple preservation of order, as to crushing the activity of the unions. General Bell expressed himself very simply on this point. 'I came,' he said, 'to do up this damned anarchistic federation.'⁹ After a long and bitter struggle in the hills of Colorado, the combined might of the owners' wealth and the state's legal and military coercion proved too powerful for the organization of the miners at that time.


The response, and in particular the poetic response, of the miners to this situation was remarkable. They articulated class values in their themes, imagery, and genres which possess a traditional character that enhanced the links between authors and community. Paul Lauter finds a similar phenomenon in other examples of working-class art:

WHILE THE ROCKEFELLERS
PLAY GOLF IN FLORIDA —



TEN THOUSAND MINERS
ARE FIGHTING FOR A LIVING
WAGE IN THEIR COLORADO
MINES

DOZENS of pickets are in jail. Winter is on and the battle is not yet won. The strikers and their families need food and clothing. Unable to save anything from the bare subsistence wage they have been receiving, the strike finds them penniless. Relief must be forthcoming if the strike is to be carried successfully.



*Hurry contributions to reach the
miners children before Xmas.*

ALL DONATIONS—MONEY AND CLOTHES—
ESPECIALLY SHOES

Should be sent to:

COLORADO MINERS RELIEF
AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE
Box 87—Walsenburg, Colorado

From New Masses, Dec., 1927.

artistic productions under capitalism: the transformation of poetry into commodities. Written neither for the market nor for posterity, the poetry was active in forming the culture of the working class at the beginning of the twentieth century. The real value of the miners' poetry was

*In many ways, therefore, working-class art like other elements of working-class life is highly traditional, even in a sense "conservative"; certainly innovative form is not a primary consideration. Similarly working-class poetry and song, especially, but also tales and the like, are often built around repeated elements – refrains, formulae, commonly accepted assumptions about characters. Language, too, is often simpler, even commonplace, less "heightened" than that of "high culture" verse.*¹⁰

The combination of tradition and innovation is especially important in the formulation of genres or types of poems written by the miners and other working-class writers.¹¹ The emotional scope in the poetic genres of the miners is varied, ranging from job-oriented chanting to poetic renditions of community storytelling to more traditional forms of expressing complaint, joy, and vituperation. They developed as a response to the differing tasks of the social group.

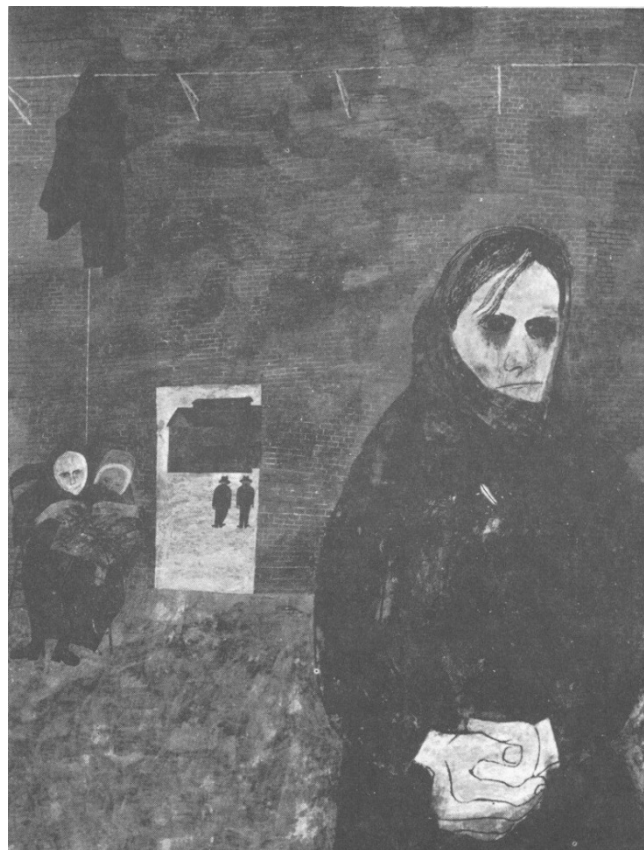
Work Poems are one of the most significant categories. The work poem arises from acute observation and intense feeling while participating in labor; it communicates the social experience shared by all members of the group. For example, Joe R. Lazure's "A Colorado Miner's Fourth" depicts the common experience of miners rescuing fellow workers in the aftermath of a mine disaster.¹² In stark contrast to non-working-class poetry, which tends to create individualized, esoteric and imaginary experiences, this type of poem strives to elicit shared emotions about real-life experiences among workers. Whether the technique used is that of traditional storytelling, as in "A Colorado Miner's Fourth," or that of chanting, as in the occupational songs more familiar among southern black workers, the function of the work poem is to shatter the social isolation of the job, to resist the monotony of the work day, or to inspire comfort or conflict.

The second main genre represented in the *Miners Magazine* is closely related to work poems. **Poems of Praise**, such as "South Range Strike," "A Colorado Heroine," "The Man Behind the Pick," "Myron Reed," "Labor Song of 1904," and "The Laborer" eulogize past and present heroes and heroines among workers and their allies.¹³ Poems of this kind commemorate the heroic deeds of model individuals or important past struggles from which the community of workers takes its lessons. For instance, "A Colorado Heroine" lauds the courageous deeds of Emma Langdon, a typographical union worker for the *Victor Record* during the Cripple Creek conflict. In other instances, pioneers of labor solidarity are eulogized, as in "Myron Reed," which refers to the clergyman who used his pulpit to support the Colorado strikers of 1894. Oftentimes, the anonymous, common worker is the subject of admiration, as in these lines from "The Man Behind the Pick": "But he does it all in silence and seldom makes a kick/Which is why I sing the praises of the man behind the pick" (11.19-20).

Since conflict begets antagonists, **Poems of Censure and Condemnation** emerge as another genre.¹⁴ The

purpose of poems like "Colorado's Shame," "Scab, Scab, Scab," "Peabody's Reign," "Curse of the Scab," and "The Secret of War" is diametrically opposed to that of poems of praise. Poems of censure and condemnation lash out at the perfidious conduct of scabs, owners, police, and other groups of enemies aligned against the workers. Such enemies are relentlessly exposed through description, narration, and dramatization, as well as by satire, invective, derision, burlesque, and mockery. Poems of this genre are designed to embolden workers and to deflate the prestige and authority of their opponents. These poems are unanimous in condemning the political antagonists as physically repulsive, morally reprehensible, and socially criminal.

Some of the poems by the Colorado miners and their allies, namely **Poems of Struggle**, form a significant group because they call upon miners to unite in action against their oppression.¹⁵ These are fighting poems, as "The Battle Song of the Toilers" illustrates in its title, and call workers to "Take arms in the cause of freedom/and fight for home and right." Although the battle call of this poem is partly metaphoric, the revolutionary theme in other poems of this genre is made more explicit by allusions to comparable situations, such as the expulsion of oppressive invaders by the Bedouins in Kearney's "A Pariah's Prayer" and the warning to the rich and idle – "Beware thou! of the insurrectionary flame;/Know thou that such as this our patriot fathers saw" – in Dagenhart's



MINERS' WIVES BEN SHAHN

"Some Questions Asked." Legal forms of united action, such as striking and voting, are also depicted in these poems of struggle. The weekly publication of the *Miners*

Magazine afforded the writers the opportunity to encourage timely support for particular acts, such as striking for a shorter work day in "The Eight-Hour Day" or voting, as in "A Behest," for socialist candidates. All the poems of this genre exhibit a determination to stand, fight, and win, using legal or illegal forms of united action, whether for some short-range goal (e.g., "A Behest") or "Earth's finished State – The Comrade Commonweal!" as in "Anvils and Hammers."

Poems of Solidarity are a distinct genre in the poetry of the Colorado miners. In these poems non-miners, foreign-born workers, and itinerant miners express their sympathy with the plight of the Colorado miners and identify with their cause.¹⁶ For example, Dale Damon, a ranch hand recruited to guard the company mines during the struggle, reveals in "On Squaw Mountain" his contradictory position, aligned with the owners and military officers, when his situation is precisely that of the miners against whom he has been placed. Similarly, "Hobo Miner" relates the experiences of migratory workers in the industry in order to support the view that "these same miners are as good as any in the crew." "A Scoto-Irish-American's Protest," "Enigmatical Acrostic," and other poems of this sort see unity between workers in different industries and even unity against political oppression in different countries as the basis for solidarity. Poems of solidarity illustrate the familiar need to overcome divisions of labor as well as national and geographic divisions.

Finally, I note the use of the traditional prose poem genre of **aphorisms**.¹⁷ Highly memorable lines such as "Agitation prevents stagnation," from William Haywood's "Bell Signals," were undoubtedly repeated among the miners. The wisdom in the pithy lines of the aphorisms, such as "Privileges are for the rich; duties for the poor," in "Outpost Echoes," stood as premises in the arguments by workers for their rights because the aphorisms summed up and condensed their common experience. The six genres which I have briefly defined and illustrated show considerable diversity of purpose. Most of the poems printed in the *Miners Magazine* during the first decade of this century (illustrated by the selection in the Appendix) belong to one or another of these genres. The extent to which these genres are natural vehicles of expression for other workers and at other times needs to be determined. The unity of the genres consists in the fact that the class of workers and their allies produced poems for themselves about the realities they shared. Each poem of the Colorado miners gives validation and convincing expression to the life experiences of the miners at work or in struggle or in community. Not only was the poetry intimately related to the daily life of workers at the earliest stage of the industrialization of the American West, but the miners conceived it as predominantly social in character and function.

The difference in the social and political character of this working-class poetry from that of established writers cannot escape even the most perfunctory examination by students and teachers who have been schooled in the tradition of "great poetry." To judge these poems by the esthetic, and ultimately the social, standards of "high" culture is a mistake because they are the product of a

distinctive psychology and social reality. The faults of working-class poetry may, indeed, be obvious. For example, some readers may object to the dependence on religious allusions, or to the occasional mixed metaphors, or even to some faulty rimes and meter – the result of hasty composition. Such objections, however, miss the point. The common values, the emotional bonds and outraged instincts, the visions of a united community for which these poems are important vehicles give them a distinctive worth which we need to measure in terms different from the ordinary assumptions about literature. For example, the fact that these poems use pronouns of collective self-reference – the "we" and "us" opposing "them" and "they" – is not a simple-minded dichotomy but a view of reality unshackled from the fragmentary consciousness of modern experience. On the other hand, the absence of artistic techniques, such as the use of poetic masks and voices as surrogates for authors' true feelings, illustrates the authenticity of feeling and thought in communicating values, rather than technical primitiveness. A more proper basis for the evaluation of these poems and others by workers can be developed by observing the regularities to be found in their thematic preoccupations.

The most prominent themes in the poetry of the Colorado miners are those of workers' self-image, ethnicity and race, and religion which come to embody the values of the mining community itself. Not only were the miners struggling for their economic and political rights, they were also arguing against propaganda intended to demean them as a class. One of the aphoristic columns in the *Miners Magazine*, "The Difference," shows the dichotomy of values and behavior which workers confronted:

A union man, thinking the guarantee of free speech means what it says, tries to persuade a scab not to work at unfair wages.

He is thrown into jail without a trial and is labeled an anarchist.

A millionaire whose wealth was secured by slave-driving in the sweat shops is welcomed into high society and made trustee of the fashionable church.

That is merely a recognition of his business ability.

A union man, rather than work to the injury of his fellow unionists, joins a sympathetic strike and endeavors to boycott an unfair employer.

That is crime worthy of life imprisonment.

A dozen manufacturers, rather than compete for business, organize a trust to rob the people and then steal the substance of widows and orphans by selling them watered stock by plausible promises.

That is commercial enterprise and its managers are hailed as captains of industry....¹⁸

The poetry was a vehicle for resisting imposed ideas and for sharing a self-image that was common but unspoken among the workers. By articulating what they thought of themselves and their opponents, the miner poets developed an authentic poetic identity and an analysis rarely available elsewhere.

The miners saw themselves as heroic, honest, just, brave, loyal, and in all ways standing up to the forces of greed, corruption, intemperance, and evil: the forces of the mine owners, superintendents, scabs, state officials, and the militia. The miners' image of themselves was inseparable from their image of the mine bosses and their agents, since it was impossible to talk about how noble the miners were, how just, how deserving, without also saying what they deserved and who they deserved it from. The miners' portrayal of themselves anticipated the epic portrayal of workers to be found in socialist realism some years later. But in a pre-socialist environment the positive self-image of the oppressed seemed to require a clear understanding of the nature of the oppressor. Hence, at the center of the self-image put forward by the miners in the *Miners Magazine*, was the imagery of producer versus parasite.

The miners saw themselves as brave at work and in battle. Sometimes the bravery of the miners is simply the ability to endure, as in these lines from an anonymous poem:

Undismayed, they toil in patience.
 Brave as any knight of old;
 Toil to gain a slender pittance
 From the men whose sordid gold
 Is the earning of their perils
 In the dark abyss beneath;
 Yet this pittance is exploited.
 Even in the crash of death.¹⁹

Or again when the miner, Jimmy Stevens, was trapped below in a mine disaster, the poet extolls the miner's traditional virtue:

Not one man in ten thousand could
 stand it, do you think?
 Entombed alive for thirteen days, and
 without food or drink.
 But Jimmy bore up bravely....

At other times the poets honor that special courage it takes to do the ordinary job, as Edgerton writes in "The Man Behind the Pick":

Up the rugged mountain-side, a
 thousand feet, he takes his way,
 Or as far into darkness from the
 cheerful light of day;
 He is shut out from the sunlight in the
 glimmer of the lamps;
 He is cut off from the sweet air in the
 sickly fumes and damps;
 He must toil in cramped positions; he

must take his life in his hand;
 For he works in deadly peril, that but
 few can understand.

Courage to these miners meant courage in struggle, such as the minister Myron Reed's, as remembered by Anna Saunders:

He was noble, brave and strong,
 (Knight of honor), when the toilers
 Grappled with gigantic wrong.
 He was with them in the conflict;
 By their side he dared to stand.

Believing that, in the words of W.T. Withrow in "Address to Colorado," "Between the truth and falsehood is the balance cast," the miners stood up as honest men. This particular image is recurrent in a number of their poems, such as "Peabody's Reign," where Marshall DeWitt cursed "a hang dog cur that never feels, but lurks where honest



Trading shots with striking coal miners

men must go" and criticized those "who grab and gather honest labor's fruit." The fact that the miners thought of themselves as honest workers led them to value highly the steadfast loyalty of their comrades, although one former scab recorded his defection and subsequent remorse in "After the Strike":

Brave men were fighting, standing
 side by side
 Fighting for justice, fighting with
 pride.
 I was with them, with them heart and
 soul,
 But when the test came I left them in

the cold.

.....
That's why I'm lonely, that's why I'm
sad.

The miners also defined themselves by the mine. The poets and the work mates knew that without the miners there would be no mine. "The Man Behind the Pick" puts it that:

He unlocks the bolted portals of the
mountains to the stores
.....
Things of comfort and of beauty, and of
usefulness are mined
By the brave, heroic fellow, who toils
on all begrimed.

Josephine Conger declares in "Labor Song of 1904" that

We are the brawn and
The muscle and brain
And at last we are wide awake.

In a similar vein, Louis James in "South Range Strike" acknowledges the miners' intelligence as well as strength:

Their families must live on chaff,
While the agents drink champagne;
But the miners now give them the laugh
And show they have some brains.

While the poetry projects an image of bravery, pride, loyalty, and intelligence, it does not fail to mention the miners' sources of dissatisfaction. Their lack of adequate food, clothing, and shelter made them aware of their oppressed social status, especially when compared to that of the superintendents and owners, as Louis James illustrated:

A miner can't exist on hash,
But could relish a beefsteak.
.....
The miner often feels cast down,
To see his children poorly clad,
While others wear the best in town
And have everything to make them glad.

Working-class women were consciously included in this poetry's imagery of resistance, and were, in fact, the authors of a number of poems in the *Miners Magazine*. Ida Crouch-Hazlett attributes to Emma Langdon the same virtues characteristic of the male miners, saying:

The true heart leaps with swelling pride

At deed courageous, soul so grand –

A woman's will in danger tried,
A woman's brave and steady hand.

Other poems, such as "Anvils and Hammers," included women in the fighting class:

O, anvils, hammer-worn! Where'er ye toil,
In shop, mine, factory, in office, dark,
In field or forest, on the land or sea,
Doing your manly or womanly best
From weary day to day for pittance wage,
Ye've born the hammers of injustice long.

Even when not performing wage work, women are depicted in this poetry as an important part of the workers' community. In "Scab, Scab, Scab" a woman requires her boyfriend to quit the "scabby race" before she would marry him. Other forms of solidarity by women in mining communities are also illustrated in the literature.²⁰ The poetry by the Colorado miners, however, is not free of sexism. The repetition of the theme of "manhood" tends to exclude women from the most rigorous occasions. For example, in "Colorado Miners' Fourth" the wife of the trapped miner waits passively at home for the results of the rescue attempt.

The miner poets were clear that they were heroic, and heroes and heroines in literature demand their villains. The working-class poets contrasted themselves to the mine supervisors, owners, and their agents. The dividing line was clear, even if the villainy was diffuse. The most common sentiment, expressed by Gwennett Gwalin in "Colorado," was that the villains were those:

Whose greed for gold makes serfs of
your mankind
Whose lust for gain takes all that they
can grind.

In other poems the villains are imaged as "legalized thieves," "the plundering few," the "slimy, unclean flood," "human coyotes," "snakebloods," "bandits," "vipers," "vulgar rich," and "predatories" of all kinds who bring their "tools" "from predatory walks of life." Who were the "tools"? They were scabs, agents, provocateurs, the press, some preachers, the militia. Henry O. Morris in "Colorado's Shame" gives one poetic analysis of the villains from top to bottom. The predators found strength, according to "Master's Dream," in their economic power, their control of the governor and the laws, in manipulation of elections, in the disunity of the workers, as well as in the reserves of labor imported from overseas. In "Peabody's Reign" Marshall De Witt would

Point to her laws to Mammon sold,
Her jurists' ermine in the mire;
Her pulpits where the god of gold

Is praised by hypocrites of hire.

The prisons, where her martyred brave

Are tortured for defending right;

The journals that uphold the knave

To rob by virtue of his might.

The honest miners saw themselves up against liars, cheaters, and bullies who shirked all honest work and performed cowardly deeds against other men and women.

It is evident from the poems in the Appendix that the worst abuse was directed at the "purchased might" of Colorado – Governor Peabody, the "tin soldiers" commanded by General Bell, and the scabs. Peabody, nominal commander in-chief of "the troops, arrayed at Lucre's side," was satirized in "Colorado's Shame" as "a common rural clown" who had reached his office "by fraud and cunning acts of knaves." Morris, like other poets writing in the genre of censure and condemnation, turned the tables by applying to the governor the propaganda image of the working man as drinking, vulgar, dumb, and dull. While greed commanded Peabody, the poets perceived Bell as playing "jumping-jack" for his master in a "burlesque opera."

The scab, even more so than the "hired poets," divided the militia into the deluded and the corrupt, the halt and the blind. They also distinguished the officers from the soldiers, as some soldiers distinguished themselves as seen in Damon's "On Squaw Mountain." The imagery of DeWitt's "Peabody's Reign" renders the militia recruits more uncharitably as "Pimps, forgers, thieves and whisky bums,/A convict mob of human brutes." The assassin was regarded by the miner poets as the lowest of all enemies. Consequently he incurred the most scathing attacks – in a tradition that is perhaps the most widespread of all in the working-class poetry of the United States. The scab was the exact opposite of the loyal and hard-working miner. At best, the scab was a well-meaning coward who "when the test came" to be brave or cowardly, loyal or selfish, failed "manhood's" test. The scab could "bluster" and "brag," or he could, as M'Cormick depicted him,

Hang[s] his head and a' that

With shuffling gait and downcast eyes.

.....

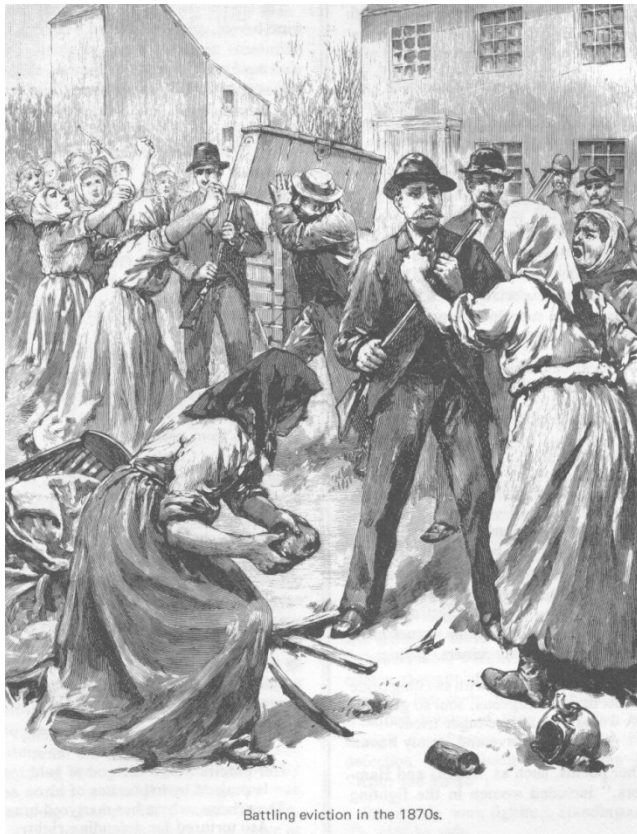
The governor may favor show

To parasites and a' that,

But manhood he can ne'er bestow;

A scab's a scab for a' that.

The miner poets mustered all the virulent anger that religion, morality, and tradition could provide against "the wretch that sells his class." Webster Rogers's "The Curse of the Scab" epitomizes the extent of the vilification. The scabbing image, however, is two-sided in the mining poetry. The mine and mill owners tried to import foreign-born scabs from the midwest, but many of these recruits refused to continue after they learned of the true situation in Colorado. Some of those few who remained were regretful, fellow workers cowed into submission by the threat of force or joblessness.



The poets show us that the miners' most consistent self-image was that of the honest and true man, occasionally narrowed into images of *white* men and fragile/passive women. But by defining themselves by the values of common humanity, by their work, and by contrast with the behavior of their opponents, the miners and their poets kept alive their identity as a class in the struggle for recognition of their hard work as producers. Ethnicity and race are less frequent themes of these poems than the workers' self-image; yet they are of considerable significance. Several historical accounts indicate that a significant percentage of the miners in the region were Italian and Mexican.²¹ Some of the poets we have noted are Scottish. One writer, John F. Kearney,

directly addresses the question of ethnicity in "A Scoto-Irish-American's Protest," which supports the political struggle in Ireland against British imperialism. The same author strikes another international note in "A Pariah's Prayer," which calls on justice and reason to rule "workingmen who've been toiling for thousands of years." Moreover, "Enigmatical Acrostic," dedicated to an Irish refugee in America, contains the lines:

Beggared exiles we of Pirate England's make

Outcasts whose spirits will not bend or break –

Live! Live! To see a European earthquake

which illustrates the kind of determination among ethnic workers to have workers of all national origins liberate themselves.

Just as the miner poems were not free from sexism, neither were they free from racism. In "The South Range Strike" Louis James used a derogatory comparison to counterpose black and white labor:

Well here's good luck to copper diggers
They are worthy of our praise,
Though they may be black as niggers
They may yet see better days.

James's demeaning epithet was, perhaps, representative of the racial prejudice of some miners. But the immigrant and Chicano base of the WFM was more likely to count class solidarity above racial division. The perceived continuity between the slavery of the white wage worker and the long historical saga of oppression of races in many countries is prominent in the opening stanzas of "The White Slave." Henry Morris and Sidney Stevens also appealed to the tradition of black struggle against slavery in the seventh stanza of this poem intended to inspire Colorado miners. The view that slaveholders of all sorts, the bosses, were the oppressors implies the kind of labor unity Big Bill Haywood epitomized when he wrote in "Bell Signals": "The supervision of industry by the producers will obliterate race prejudice and imaginary boundary lines."

Religion was a central theme of many of the poems from the *Miners Magazine*, but the attitudes of the writers toward religion was varied and sometimes contradictory. The basic elements of the orthodox Christian vision are retained intact in a few poems, such as Withrow's "Address to Colorado." Probably influenced by Tennyson, Withrow idealized the pre-1904 life in Colorado by characterizing it as "The holy, quiet,/Deep, majestic calm of peace." Even more conventionally, he used an allegory of the Garden of Eden in the opening stanzas to equate the miners' oppression with man's fall – a stock device in the literary use of Christian ideology. Moreover, his solution to the class war at Cripple Creek (in stanzas seven through nine) is that the miners will obtain justice after the Last Judgment, at the end of history, through God's recognition of the righteousness of the miners' cause. This thoroughly idealistic view of work, history, oppression, and struggle was a minority view, but one which persisted, as is shown by James B. Clarke's similar poem, "The Voice of God," published in the *Miners Magazine* in 1918.

A more contradictory attitude toward religion is adopted in many other poems such as John Kearney's "A Pariah's Prayer." In a conventional way Kearney's meditation beseeched God to aid the miners: "God of Justice . . . will you nerve us to get it through the fears/of legalized thieves." But imploring turned into the need for action when the poet realized "Far too long we've been pleading for mercy." The efficacy of heavenly intervention is abandoned in favor of self-determination by the miners for whom "justice can be had for the taking." Kearney's prayer illustrates, with its demystifying analysis of the working man's situation, the developing consciousness of the miners about religion.

In de-emphasizing social institutions poets like Kearney frequently criticized organized religion. Kearney's

own "A Scoto-Irish-American's Protest" used a bishop as a symbol of institutionalized religion, which is dispensed with when the institution upholds exploitation. Similarly, "Peabody's Reign" condemns "pulpits where the god of gold/Is praised by hypocrites of hire," and "Pulpits breathe forth libels" in "The White Slave." In "The Master's Dream" I.F. Mandeville satirized the use made of organized religion by the masters, who are made to say:

We must see that our priests and the preachers
Handle our cause in their text;
The poor are very fond of religion,
And through it they will never get next.

Reversing the traditional associations of religious symbols and images achieved much the same effect in other poems like Roland Onwood's "Anvils and Hammers." Onwood commended to the workers the Christian analogues of Polycarp who, like an anvil, withstood brutal punishment and Christ who, like a hammer, drove the money merchants from the Temple. The workers, however, were counseled to seek their own salvation by voting.

Such expression of class-conscious criticism of institutional religion led some of the poets to question the entire religious outlook. In "Curse of the Scab" the poet, Webster Rogers, questioned the most essential element of any religious view, namely a superhuman god, with the critical line "Yet the nation's flag is a painted rag/And the bigot's god a dream." The ultimate sin for the working class, as Rogers saw it, was not the denial of God but of one's class. This was the standard by which the miners judged each other and also God, as the lines from the "White Slave" show: "The white slave's cup of woe is surely full/God of the wealthy, if thou be their God,/Cover thine eyes when this cup overflows."

The poetry of the Colorado miners illustrates a creative spring of thought and feeling made communicable by means of a diversity of genres that are characteristic of the working class alone. The miners' themes of moral and social identity, of race and ethnicity, and of religion both reflected their values and were instrumental in advancing the concerns of this sector of the working class during the early part of the twentieth century. Similar poetry by garment workers, butchers, seamen, painters, steelworkers, and communication operators, to name but a few occupations, can be found. To dig for these works would surely be productive, since the reconstruction of working-class culture can lead us to a deeper understanding of and to a broader basis for judging our history and values.

NOTES

1. There has been some movement in recent years by scholars and teachers to examine working-class literature seriously. Paul Lauter's article, "Working-Class Women's Literature -- An Introduction to Study," provides in the appendices as comprehensive a list of books and articles containing working-class poetry by men and women as is available. Lauter's essay is a much needed guide to this area of study. Martha Vicinus's seminal studies on British working-class literature are fundamental for any work in this area. They include: *The Industrial Muse* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1975); "Literary Voices of an Industrial

Town," in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, vol. 2, ed. H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 739-61; and "The Study of Nineteenth-Century British Working-Class Poetry," in *The Politics of Literature*, ed. Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter (New York: Vintage, 1970), pp. 322-53. Other valuable attempts to rectify the one-sided view of literature too often found in our classrooms have appeared in this journal, but see especially Jack Weston, "Revising the Canon of British Eighteenth-Century Literature," *Radical Teacher* #2, pp. 25-29, for issues about pedagogy and working-class poetry. The importance of theoretical work on working-class poetry cannot be underestimated, since traditional literary theory has failed to provide any adequate means for dealing with this abundance of material. Yet the most immediate need, it seems to me, is for the discovery of hitherto unknown or ignored examples of working-class poetry by women and men of different occupations, places, and periods of time in the last century. As the known body of this literature grows in size and heterogeneity, significant theoretical advances can be foreseen.

2. Attention is due contemporary writers who confirm or show us the values of traditional working-class literature and life. For one fine example of how ethnic and class history provide literature with special value, I urge Peter Oresick's collection of poems, *The Story of Glass* (Cambridge, Mass.: West End Pressbook, 1977). The title poem and others in this volume express the point of view of glassworkers, particularly of Slovakian heritage, at the Pittsburgh Plate and Glass Factory in Ford City, Pennsylvania, where Oresick worked in between his years as an undergraduate.

3. *The Jungle*.

4. This opinion was answered quite adequately, in my judgment, by Lu Xun in "Literature and Revolution" (1928) when he said: "All literature becomes propaganda as soon as you show it to anyone. This applies to individualist works as well, once you write them down. Indeed, the only way to avoid this is by not writing or opening your mouth.... However, though all literature is propaganda, not all propaganda is literature.... In addition to catchwords, slogans, notices, telegrams and textbooks, the revolution needs literature -- just because it is literature."

5. Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW* (New York: Quadrangle, 1969), p. 22.

6. Benjamin M. Rastall, "The Labor History of the Cripple Creek District," *Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin*, no. 198, Economic and Political Science Series, III, no. 1 (Madison, Wisc., 1908), p. 61. Rastall's analysis of the significance of the Cripple Creek situation remains the best account to date. He says: "The history of the Cripple Creek District is one of rapid and spectacular growth. The sudden rise of a complete social fabric in a mountain wilderness, and the transformation of a barren area to a center producing \$2 million a month, formed the background of an equally rapid industrial development which finds its chief exponent in the mining labor movements. The district forms a small but distinct physiographical and political area. Within this area the stages of a complete industrial evolution have been passed through in a little more than a decade. Starting with primitive frontier labor conditions there was a rapid succession of stages ending in extreme capitalization and extraordinary organization. Gathering the strength of forces shut in unto themselves, and keeping pace with the other rapid developments, the labor-capital issues finally broke forth in a conflict worthy of the name revolution" (p. 10).

7. Quoted by Dubofsky, p. 39.

8. *The Cripple Creek Strike: A History of Industrial Wars in Colorado* (New York: rpt. Arno Press, 1969), p. 36.

9. *Heritage of Conflict: Labor Relations in the Non-Ferrous Metals Industry Up to 1930* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, n.d.), p. 130.

10. "Working-Class Women's Literature," *Radical Teacher* #15, 1980. Indeed Lauter's perception is nontrivial, especially when one considers "traditionalism" as a characteristic of working-class literature throughout the world. For example, the cultural movement in China during the 1930s utilized old forms popular in Chinese culture, *dazhong wenyi*, which were rooted in the life and history of the people. Lu Xun, who practiced what he preached, provided a dynamic perspective on the value of traditional class forms when he said: "When eliminating something, we have to add something. The result is the emergence of new forms. This is innovation." Lu Xun *Quanji* (Peking: Jenmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1958), p. 20.

11. The categories discussed here are intended to be descriptive, pragmatic, and open-ended. The typology is meant to apply to other working-class poems as well, although the limits of the topic prevent illustration. The validity of this taxonomy is open to criticism, in fact, invites it for the purpose of correction, expansion, and reformulation. Confronted, on the one hand by no available literary theory, and on the other by the evidence of these and other poems, we need to start with some explicit emotional/political and situation criteria which do not sever the authors and the audience from the poems. Hopefully, better scholars can improve on this eventually.

12. *Miners Magazine* (hereafter MM), VI, 109 (July 27, 1905), pp. 11-12. All poems of the Colorado miners cited in this article are reprinted in the Appendix under their specific genres. I have not traced the working-class origin of each poet conclusively. The vast majority of the poems are by workers or are otherwise noted. I give full citations for each poem in the footnotes below in order to facilitate re-examination of the primary material by others. Berton Braley's "The Worker," MM (June, 1917), n.p., is also a "work poem" although of a later date than the Cripple Creek strike. Work poems, as defined in this article, are similar to many popular broadsides written by Manchester weavers between 1790 and 1810 about which Vicinus, "Literary Voices," p. 742, says that "poetry of this type, although written by one person, is not individualized, but is the response of a member of a particular group; its chief function is to describe accurately a well-known situation for that group."

13. Poems of praise: J.A. Edgerton, "The Man Behind the Pick," MM, V, 22 (Nov. 26, 1903), p. 11; Josephine Conger, "Labor Song of 1904," MM, V, 31 (Jan. 28, 1904), p. 14; Louis James, "The South Range Strike," MM, V, 42 (April 14, 1904), pp. 13-14; Anna M. Saunders, "Myron Reed! A Man and Hero," MM, V, 35 (Feb. 25, 1904), p. 7; Ida Crouch Hazlett, "A Colorado Heroine," MM, V, 36 (March 3, 1904), pp. 10-11; Alfred Bern, "The Laborer," MM, V, 16 (Oct. 15, 1903), pp. 14-15.

14. Poems of censure and condemnation: Webster Rogers, "The Curse of the Scab," MM, VI, 56 (July 21, 1904), pp. 14-15; Anonymous, "Scab, Scab, Scab," MM, V, 28 (Jan. 7, 1904), p. 15; William M'Cormick, "A Scab's A Scab For A' That," MM, V, 45 (May 10, 1904); Anonymous, "After the Strike," MM, V, 28 (Jan. 7, 1904), p. 15; ANYONEMOST, "The Secret of War," MM, V, 20 (Nov. 12, 1903), p. 13; Marshall DeWitt, "Peabody's Reign," MM, V, 34 (Feb. 18, 1904), pp. 11-12; Berton Braley, "The Traitor," MM (June, 1917), n.p.; Henry O. Morris and Sidney Stevens, "The White Slave," VI, 68 (Oct. 16, 1904), p. 14; Henry O. Morris, "Colorado's Shame," V, 32 (Feb. 4, 1904), pp. 12-13.

15. Poems of struggle: M.E. Pisto, "The Battle Song of the Toilers," MM, V, 33 (Feb. 11, 1904), pp. 13-14; Shorty P., "A Behest," MM, V, 52 (June 23, 1904), p. 15; Shorty P., "The Eight-Hour Day," MM, V, 48 (May 26, 1904), p. 13; Roland Onwood, "Anvils and Hammers," MM, V, 48 (May 24, 1904), p. 14; John F. Kearney, "A Pariah's Prayer," MM, V, 20 (Nov. 12, 1903), p. 13; "Gwennett Gwalla," "Colorado," MM, V, 42 (April 14, 1904), p. 14; "Nemo," "A Warning," MM, V, 30 (Jan. 21, 1904), p. 15; Ernest Dagenhart, "Some Questions Asked," MM, V, 20 (Nov. 12, 1903), p.15.

16. Poems of solidarity: John F. Kearney, "Enigmatical Acrostic," MM, V, 31 (Jan. 28, 1904), p. 14; John F. Kearney, "A Scoto-Irish-American's Protest," MM, V, 17 (Oct. 22, 1903), p. 14; Dale Damon, "On Squaw Mountain," MM, V, 20 (Nov. 12, 1903), p. 14; Joe Lazure, "Hobo Miner," MM, VI, 94 (March 13, 1905), p. 13; I.F. Mandeville, "The Master's Dream," MM, V, 26 (Dec. 24, 1903), p. 14; W.T. Withrow, "Address to Colorado," MM, V, 52 (June 23, 1904), p. 15.

17. Aphorisms: William D. Haywood, "Bell Signals," MM, V, 52 (June 23, 1904), p. 7; Anonymous, "Outpost Echoes," MM, V, 18 (Oct. 29, 1903), p. 14.

18. MM, V, 52 (June 23, 1904), p. 9.

19. MM, V, 33 (Feb. 11, 1904), p. 13.

20. Cf. *The Autobiography of Mother Jones*, ed. Mary Field Patton (Chicago: Charles Kerr Pub. Co., 1925), details the involvement of Mary Harris Jones at the Cripple Creek Strike during this period, especially chapters 13 and 15.

21. For example, cf. *Mother Jones*, p. 99, where she related her experiences at Cripple Creek at the time of the strike in November, 1903. At the WFM convention she addressed the miners, saying, "You English-speaking miners of the northern fields promised your southern brothers, 70 percent of whom do not speak English, that you would support them to the end. Now you are asked to betray them, to make a separate settlement. You have a common enemy and it is your duty to fight to a finish. The enemy seeks to conquer by dividing your ranks, by making distinctions between North and South, between American and foreign. You are all miners, fighting a common cause, a common master. The iron heel feels the same to all flesh."



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