

The Book of the Year: Blue, Too, More Writing By (For or About) Working-Class Queers edited by Wendell Ricketts; FourCats Press; 486 pages.

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In 2005, the gay-owned Suspect Thoughts Press published *Everything I Have Is Blue: Short Fiction by Working-Class Men about More-or-Less Gay Life* edited by Wendell Ricketts. The book was nominated for a Lambda Literary Award and also appeared on my own list of the best books of 2005. Unfortunately, except for these kudos and a few reviews, *Everything I Have Is Blue* was mostly ignored and soon went out of print (while Suspect Thoughts went out of business). For his part, Ricketts refused to give up. Nine years after he single-handedly created the genre of gay, working-class literature, Ricketts revived it with a new anthology: *Blue, Too, More Writing By (For or About) Working-Class Queers*. Published by Ricketts's own FourCats Press, *Blue, Too* is, like its predecessor, self-financed.

When I first came out, I thought I was not beautiful enough to be gay. Now I wonder if I am wealthy enough to be gay. Affluent, mostly-white men dominate gay life and gay literature, as witnessed by the expensive circuit parties and fundraisers that dominate our social life. Working-class, blue collar men, when they exist, are merely sex objects to be lusted after. This misconception of working-class men was evident in a review of the first *Blue* book, where the critic invited his readers to lend the book "to the cute guy who delivers bottled water to your office every month. Or your hunky garbage man. Basically, anyone hot with a blue collar," as if working-class men could not buy their own books.

Literature, Ricketts remind us, "instructs us. We must be vigilant, then, as we take our pleasure in reading, because one of the main ways that literature instructs is by what it refuses to name, by what it omits, elides, or just plain fumbles. Literature is never neutral and it is never still." Most of the time, "men and women who come from or live in or were formed by the working class ... don't see ourselves much in American queer literature." Nor do many blue collar, men-loving-men view themselves as gay, which is why, when the first *Blue* book was published, "the part of the title that lay east of the colon – the 'more-or-less gay' part – was no accident. ... Then, as now, I don't presume to know how other queer people with working-class loyalties, families, lives, home towns, sensibilities have, over the course of their lives, managed their relationship to that vexed and freighted notion, 'gay.' But I'll bet there's not one of them who hasn't at one time or another in his or her adult life been in conflict over the label, hasn't worn it sometimes not because it fits or was flattering but because it seemed to be the only shirt in the closet."

In *Blue Too*, Ricketts "reprints some reader favorites from *Everything I Have Is Blue* and, in that sense, bears a passing resemblance to a second edition. On the other hand, half the pieces in Section I are new...; the Afterword has been completely revamped, updated, and expanded; and the Reader's Guide and Annotated Bibliography ... are original to this volume. So, *Blue, Too* is also something like a sequel. What it really is, is a hybrid." Ricketts's own "expanded" Afterword, "Class/Mates: Further Outings in the Literatures and Cultures of the Ga(y)ted Community," runs 110 pages and is worth the price of the book. Here Ricketts discusses in great detail the scope of queer, working-class literature and the people who created and inspired it.

"I continue to be proud of the work in *Everything I Have Is Blue* and *Blue, Too*, Ricketts concludes, "and I remain committed to what the books represent: the effort to add colors to the palette of American identity, rebut the reductionisms of 'multiculturalism,' confuse categories that deserve to be confused, propagandize where propaganda is well warranted. Though I spent years wandering queer literature in search of something like home, I now know that the writers in this collection are the people I needed to find."

Jesse's Journal

by Jesse Monteagudo

