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E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* at Fifty *Introduction*

Bryan D. Palmer

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PRESENTATION / PRÉSENTATION

E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* at Fifty

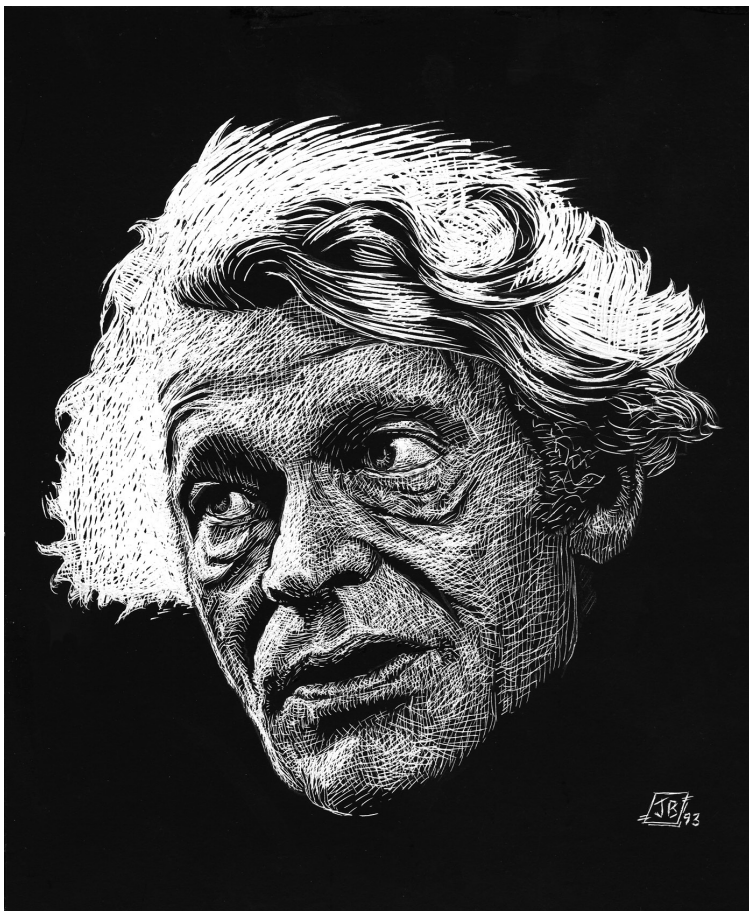
Introduction

Bryan D. Palmer

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1963, E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* is arguably the most influential book in the modern historiography of working-class studies. Indeed, Thompson's imaginative and impassioned approach to class formation has proven a presence animating historical writing and theoretical excursions in a variety of general subject areas and academic disciplines for decades. Its impact on the explosion of historical scholarship on the Canadian working class that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, and that formed a significant part of the intellectual context in which *Labour/le Travail* has developed, is impossible to understate.

This year, 2013, is the 50th anniversary of the publication of Thompson's pioneering study. To mark this milestone, *Labour/Le Travail* has asked a number of scholars to provide thoughts on how they assess *The Making of the English Working Class* at the current juncture. Those asked to contribute constitute a mixture of Canadian and international scholars, those whose familiarity with Thompson's classic statement is longstanding and those for whom the decisiveness of the text is perhaps less obvious. What is the meaning, in our times, of Thompson's powerful contribution to rethinking how class is made and makes itself? The answers provided by our interlocutors vary, revealing much about themselves, as well as about Thompson, whose images appear in our pages courtesy of a creative artistic talent and imaginative historian, Joshua Brown, Executive Director of the innovative American Social History Project. Both the substance and significance of *The Making of the English Working Class* and the contested nature of writing history in our times are highlighted in the

short essays of the following roundtable discussion. The compilation of views that appear below will be extended by a second set of commentaries in our next issue.



Throw the forbidden places open
Let the dragons and the lions play.
Let us swallow the worm of power
And the name pass away.

E.P. Thompson, "A Charm Against Evil," (1986)