International Influences in Finnish
Working-Class Literature and Its Research

Guest Editors
Kirsti Salmi-Niklander and Kati Launis

Theme Issue of the *Journal of Finnish Studies*
Volume 18  Number 2  July 2015
ISSN 1206-6516
ISBN 978-1-937875-95-4
JOURNAL OF FINNISH STUDIES EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICE

Journal of Finnish Studies, Department of English, 1901 University Avenue, Evans 458 (P.O. Box 2146), Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX 77341-2146, USA
Tel. 1.936.294.1420; Fax 1.936.294.1408

SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADVERTISING, AND INQUIRIES
Contact Business Office (see above & below).

EDITORIAL STAFF

Helena Halmari, Editor-in-Chief, Sam Houston State University; halmari@shsu.edu
Hanna Snellman, Co-Editor, University of Helsinki; Hanna.Snellman@helsinki.fi
Scott Kaukonen, Assoc. Editor, Sam Houston State University; kaukonen@shsu.edu
Hilary Joy Virtanen, Asst. Editor, Finlandia University; hilary.virtanen@finlandia.edu
Sheila Embleton, Book Review Editor, York University; embleton@yorku.ca

EDITORIAL BOARD

Börje Vähämäki, Founding Editor, JoFS, Professor Emeritus, University of Toronto
Raimo Anttila, Professor Emeritus, University of California, Los Angeles
Michael Branch, Professor Emeritus, University of London
Thomas DuBois, Professor, University of Wisconsin
Sheila Embleton, Distinguished Research Professor, York University
Aili Flint, Emerita Senior Lecturer, Associate Research Scholar, Columbia University
Titus Hjelm, Lecturer, University College London
Richard Impola, Professor Emeritus, New Paltz, New York
Daniel Karvonen, Senior Lecturer, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis
Andrew Nestingen, Associate Professor, University of Washington, Seattle
Jyrki Nummi, Professor, Department of Finnish Literature, University of Helsinki
Juha Pentikäinen, Professor, Institute for Northern Culture, University of Lapland
Oiva Saarinen, Professor Emeritus, Laurentian University, Sudbury
George Schoolfield, Professor Emeritus, Yale University
Beth L. Virtanen, Professor, South University Online
Keijo Virtanen, Professor, University of Turku
Marianne Wargelin, Independent Scholar, Minneapolis
SUBSCRIPTION RATES 2014-15 (2 ISSUES PER YEAR)
Individuals: US $40  Institutions: US $50  
Europe €40  Europe €50

ADVERTISEMENTS (BLACK & WHITE ONLY)
Half page $50/€50  Full page $100/€100  
Inside back cover $200/€200  Outside back cover $250/€250

MORE INFORMATION
Contact Business Office, or http://www.shsu.edu/~eng_www/finnishstudies/

©2015 Journal of Finnish Studies

Cover: The crest of Turun Työväenyhdistys (The Workers’ Society of Turku) from the 1890s, Työväenmuseo Werstas (The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas) collections (TK 8080), photographer Teemu Ahola. Published with the permission of Työväenmuseo Werstas (The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas), Tampere.

Cover design: Scott Kaukonen.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

*Helena Halmari*: Editorial  
*Kati Launis*: The Making of the Finnish Working Class in Early Twentieth-Century Working-Class Literature  
*Mikko Pollari*: The Literally International Adventures of Vihtori Kosonen  
*Elsi Hyttinen*: Women in Early Capitalism and Other Irrelevant Issues: Elvira Willman’s Struggle for Working-Class Authorship  
*Kirsti Salmi-Niklander*: “Nor Happiness, nor Majesty, nor Fame”: Proletarian Decadence and International Influence in Early Twentieth-Century Finnish Working-Class Literature  
*Hanne Koivisto*: Devotedly International—But Always Wrong: Left-Wing Intellectuals and Their Orientation toward International Progressive Culture and Literature in the 1930s and 1940s  
*Veli-Matti Pynttäri*: Recognizing Your Class: Toivo Pekkanen, Raoul Palmgren, and Literature for the Working Class  
*Jaana Torninoja-Latola*: “I Have Had a Feeling That Authors Take Their Responsibility Too Lightly”: Elvi Sinervo as a Working-Class Author  
*Milla Peltonen*: Reshaping Finnish Working-Class Prose: Hannu Salama’s *Siinä näkijä missä tekijä* as a Postrealistic Novel  
*Jussi Ojajärvi*: The Dirty Class: The Re-Intensified Antagonism of Capital and Labor, and the Politics of Arto Salminen  

**Book Reviews**


Contributors 219
The *Journal of Finnish Studies* is proud to bring to readers our newest theme issue, *International Influences in Finnish Working-Class Literature and Its Research*. This collection of ten essays, edited by Kirsti Salmi-Niklander and Kati Launis, is groundbreaking. It tackles topics that have not been well covered in past research. Those of our subscribers who do not read Finnish—yet who are interested in Finland’s literature—can read here about a number of leftist authors and their lives. You will learn about Vihtori Kosonen’s adventures during the tumults of the Russian Revolution, Kasperi Tanttu’s violent death in the aftermath of Finland’s Civil War, left-wing intellectuals’ maneuvering during the politically volatile 1930s and 1940s, Elvira Willman’s execution in the Soviet Union, and the poet Elvi Sinervo’s imprisonment during the Second World War. The collection presents quotations from these authors, thus allowing us to hear their voices and see, perhaps only for a moment, the world from their point of view.

These working-class authors had an enormous impact on Finland’s cultural life, controversial as this impact may sometimes have been. Collectively, and even as individuals, they had amazingly broad international contacts and connections—for authors who lived in a country at the geographic periphery of the world. Their travels ranged from Moscow to Paris, from Soviet Russia to the United States. They brought world-renowned authors from other countries to Finland—and they wrote. Yet, not only did they create, in Finnish, literature that was heavily influenced by proletarian writings elsewhere in the world, they were also instrumental in making world literature accessible to more Finnish readers by translating, editing, publishing, and reviewing. They introduced many Finnish readers to Tolstoy and Gorky, Byron and Shelley, Steinbeck and London. And they also introduced Engels, Kautsky, and Sartre.

A long period of time is covered by this volume, starting from the early twentieth century. Through the Second World War and through Toivo Pekkanen, we are brought to the present day, to meet Hannu Salama and Arto Salminen. We read of eccentric characters and decadent men, but we also read of women—Hilja
Pärssinen, Elvira Willman, Elvi Sinervo, Kaisu-Mirjami Rydberg—and their struggles with problems of class and gender. We read of the clubs and societies that nurtured these authors’ creativity, and we learn about the literary journals they edited.

Many contributors to this collection discuss the problem of defining working-class authorship: who, in the history of Finland’s proletarian writing, is entitled to be defined as a working-class author—and why? The influence of Raoul Palmgren, as a critic and as a writer, becomes evident throughout the volume. Can Elvira Willman be called a proletarian author, despite the fact that she was born into a bourgeois home? Is Toivo Pekkanen not a working-class writer because he does not write explicitly about class struggle?

—and then, disturbingly, I realize that of all the colorful and talented authors discussed in this issue, I am most familiar with Toivo Pekkanen. He is the one I remember best from my school-time readings. Were the others not mentioned, or does my memory fail?

It is time we learn of them all, learn more about them, are introduced to more of their writings, and hear their life stories. I want to thank the editors for putting together this important resource. It is my wish that this issue will be read not only by individuals interested in Finland’s working-class literature but that it will also be used as a text in comparative literature programs in universities and in departments of Scandinavian studies around the world. In Finland, it will certainly have a growing readership as, adhering to the traditions outlined in this collection, Finland continues to reach out to the world and to retain, within its boundaries, a large non-native population, who need English as the medium to learn about Finland’s past.

Finlandia Foundation National has provided the Journal of Finnish Studies with significant financial support for publishing this issue. Their grant helped us to pay for its printing, and, more importantly, helped us in bringing research from and about Finland to an English-speaking audience. Thank you, Finlandia Foundation National.

Helena Halmari
NEW RESEARCH TRENDS IN FINNISH WORKING-CLASS LITERATURE: INTRODUCTION

Kirsti Salmi-Niklander, University of Helsinki
Kati Launis, University of Turku

During the last decade, Finnish working-class literature has become both a topic of lively interdisciplinary discussion and the subject of an increasing number of published studies. This issue addresses that multidisciplinary theme and presents the results of the newly revived interest by reviewing works that span a hundred years, from Elvira Willman’s play *Lyyli* (1903) to Arto Salminen’s novel *Kalavale: Kansalliseepos* (Epic lie: A national epic) (2005). During the twentieth century, styles and literary trends have undergone a profound change, but a thematic thread can nonetheless be traced and outlined in the literature depicting the working-class experience and criticizing capitalist society.

A solid basis for the study of working-class literature in times to come has been the research conducted by Raoul Palmgren on Finnish working-class literature, *Joukkosydän* I–II (The collective heart I–II) (1966) and *Kapinalliset kynät* I–III (Rebellious pens I–III) (1983–84). In his articles, doctoral thesis (1965), and monographs, Palmgren coined definitions for working-class literature that are based on a Marxist theoretical framework. As a young left-wing intellectual and a member of the literary group Kiila (Wedge) in the 1930s and 1940s, Palmgren was himself a part of his own research area.

Palmgren also established the field of working-class literature by defining the significant issues, such as the importance of a writer’s proletarian roots and origin. Even though researchers of the next generation have been critical of these strict definitions (see Hyttinen 2012, 29), they appreciate Palmgren as a prolific writer who

---

1 The guest-editing of this theme issue has been supported by Kirsti Salmi-Niklander’s fellowship from the Academy of Finland, entitled “Between voice and paper: Authorial and narrative strategies in oral-literary traditions.”
consulted a variety of source materials. Moreover, Palmgren’s interpretations have also inspired us to undertake new readings of these forgotten texts. The catalyst for this revived research has been new theoretical discussions in the fields of literary studies and cultural history. These new theoretical approaches include contextualization and narrative analysis, class theory, and the from-below perspective.

The revived interest in working-class literature is related to other current research orientations. In folklore studies, Ulla-Maija Peltonen (1996, 2003) and Anne Heimo (2010) have explored the oral-literary traditions and the politics of memory that are related to the Finnish Civil War of 1918, and the oral tradition in working-class communities has been studied by Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto (2013) and Niina Lappalainen (2010).

The articles in this volume focus on printed literature and on those writers who succeeded in getting their works published. However, in the study of working-class literature, the term “publishing” is complex, as Kirsti Salmi-Niklander has pointed out in her research on handwritten newspapers and alternative publishing strategies among working-class young people. Handwritten newspapers were a popular tradition in Finnish student organizations and popular movements during the second half of the nineteenth century, and these newspapers were adopted by the labor movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although handwritten newspapers were most often produced as only one single copy, they served as an important alternative medium in working-class communities, especially in the communities that were small, rural, and industrial, as well as among young working-class women. Many working-class authors (for example, see Jaana Torninoja-Latola’s article on Elvi Sinervo) had their first texts published in handwritten newspapers (Salmi-Niklander 2004, 2011).

We have selected international influences in Finnish working-class literature as a special theme for the articles in this issue. Despite their limited formal education, many working-class writers have developed a network of extensive international contacts and have been influenced by international writers. For example, many Finnish working-class writers have been inspired by Jack London and Maksim Gorky, but a closer analysis of these materials also reveals other influences, such as Percy Bysshe Shelley, August Strindberg, Jean-Paul Sartre, and William Faulkner, as well as the British in-yer-face theatre of the 1990s. This international perspective also applies to our research perspectives. Currently, new perspectives for the analysis of Finnish working-class literature are derived, for example, from class theory and the new biographical turn.
The writing of the Finnish American working class would warrant a special issue dedicated to this genre. Among the best-known Finnish American and Finnish Canadian writers were Moses Hahl, Aku Päiviö, A. B. Mäkelä (Kaapro Jääskeläinen), and Mikael Rutanen. As Mikko Pollari observes in his article, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Atlantic became “more of a two-way street,” since about one-third of the migrants returned to Finland with new experiences and impressions. In his article, Pollari explores the colorful, transnational literary career of Vihtori Kosonen, an author and publisher.

The Birth and Development of Finnish Working-Class Literature

As Aimo Roininen (1993) has shown in his thorough study *Kirja liikkeessä: Kirjallisuus institutiona vanhassa työväenliikkeessä 1895–1918* (The book in movement: Literature as an institution in the old labor movement 1895–1918), Finnish working-class literature emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century at the same time as the Finnish labor movement and labor press. Some writers who were associated with the socialist movement were from middle-class families, they studied at the university, and they were familiar with contemporary trends in Finnish and international literature. However, many writers who had only very limited formal education were recruited from the working class and the landless rural population. Over the past ten years, these self-educated writers in nineteenth-century rural Finland have become a topic of multidisciplinary research (Kauranen 2013; Kuismin 2012).

The birth of the Finnish labor movement was strongly related to the period of Russification at the turn of the century. The most radical measures at this time were the Language Manifesto of 1900 and the Military Service Law of 1901. In addition, the Finnish Labor Party was formed in 1899 (by 1903, it was known as the Social Democratic Party). At first, the party refused to join the struggle to oppose the Russification measures. However, the Socialists took an active role in the General Strike in November 1905, following the 1905 Russian Revolution, and this resulted in the complete revision of the Finnish governmental system from a four-estate Diet to a modern parliament, with universal suffrage attained in 1906 (Kirby 2006, 137–46).

During the following decade, the parliamentary system suffered as the Russian government reasserted its control. Many urgent reforms, especially a land reform that could have solved rising problems for the population of crofters and the landless, could not be made. This created political and social controversies, which resulted in a widening gap between the middle class and the socialist labor movement.
Although the Finns were not recruited to fight during the First World War, the state of war gave the Russian government an opportunity to intensify censorship and to restrict organizational activities. The revolutionary year of 1917 culminated in the Finnish declaration of independence in December and in the Civil War between the Red and the White Guards from January through May 1918 (Kirby 2006, 148–63).

The working class began to organize during Finland’s transition from an estate to a class society. There was not a clean break from the old system to a new one, but rather a long, historical process. Historical research has tracked the changes underlying this process: economic growth, migration to the towns, and the rise of civic organizations. However, as historian Pertti Haapala argues, the new society was not a heaven, but a class society. While the hierarchy of the estates weakened, the class boundaries of the new society began to penetrate public awareness and to be expressed in public speech. This new type of communality was referred to in the political language of that time as the “working class” (Haapala 2005, 18–19).2

Despite censorship and restrictions, the years before the Civil War in 1918 constituted a period of intensive literary activity. However, the Civil War put an abrupt end to many plans and visions, and many manuscripts and even printed texts were lost. Indeed, a whole generation of working-class writers was destroyed, either killed (Kössi Ahmala, Kasperi Tanttu) or exiled (Kössi Kaatra, Elvira Willman-Eloranta). Many of the writers who managed to survive were compelled to serve long prison sentences (Hilja Pärssinen, Kaarlo Uskela). Many suffered from mental and physical problems, and they encountered great difficulties in publishing their texts. After the war, the survivors had to devise new strategies to publish, and to process their traumatic experiences in writing, as the literary field in Finland was almost completely controlled by the victorious Whites (Koskela 1999).

After the Civil War, the Finnish labor movement split into two factions: social democratic and communist. The Finnish Communist Party was founded in Moscow by a group of exiled Red leaders in 1918. In Finland, the left-wing socialists founded the Socialist Workers’ Party (Suomen Sosialistinen Työväenpuolue) in 1920, which succeeded in getting twenty-three members elected to Parliament in the 1922 elections. However, in 1923, the entire group of Parliament members and the party executive were arrested. Nonetheless, the left-wing socialists continued their work in the alliance of workers and peasants (Kirby 2006, 171–72).

2 The concept of working class first occurred in written Finnish in 1863 (Heikkinen 1997, 68–71), and it was adopted eagerly into the rhetoric of the writers of the movement. Expressions such as the plodder class (raatajaluokka), slaves of wages (palkkaorjat), work class (työluokka), and underclass (alaluokka) all refer to the same subject, people who do physical labor.
The 1920s, with independence newly gained from Russia, was a short-lived period of cultural modernism in the spirit of “the windows open wide to Europe.” Yet the tide soon turned, and, during the 1930s, Finland became a right-wing, patriotic, and backward-looking society, sealing herself off from the ethos of the previous decade. The threat of an all-out war was imminent in Europe, and this was reinforced in Finland by the fear of the communist Soviet Union. The conservative power elite in Finland abhorred the secularization of values as well as the social radicalization that was evolving. For the Finnish power elite, internationalization was a dangerous trend that could import undesirable ideas of change. Socialism was also considered to be a threat to Finnish national independence, as Finland shared a long border with the Soviet Union.

To stem the tide of threat, in 1930, legislation, referred to as the Communist Laws was passed. These laws were enacted to deter extreme leftist activities as well as to prevent contacts with the Soviet Union and with the Finnish communist expatriates who lived there. In this complex situation, the small faction of left-wing intellectuals (Raoul Palmgren, Jarno Pennanen, Kaisu-Mirjami Rydberg, Maija Savutie, Elvi Sinervo, Cay Sundström, and Arvo Turtiainen) began their cultural and political battle against the bourgeois cultural elite. This movement was led by V. A. Koskenniemi, a poet and a professor at the University of Turku. In 1936, a coalition of working-class authors founded a literary group known as Kiila (Wedge). Characteristic of the political climate of the time, membership in the largest right-wing patriotic student association, Academic Carelia Society, was ten times the membership of the Academic Socialist Association. Moreover, left-wing intellectuals were not only opposed in the cultural field, but they also faced resistance from authorities and lawmakers in the whole of society (Karkama and Koivisto 1999, 8–13). As if this right-wing opposition was not enough, the left-wing intellectuals were also considered strange by those within the workers’ movement. For example, the journalist Jarno Pennanen and working-class writers Lauri Vilenius and Paavo Pajunen belonged to the illegal Finnish Communist Party; Kaisu-Mirjami Rydberg and Cay Sundström were left-wing Social Democrats and members of parliament.

One of the topics debated by the left-wing intellectuals of the 1930s concerned the notion of the working-class author. The opposing views in this argument centered, for example, on the question of whether or not it was reasonable to refer to Toivo Pekkanen—originally a blacksmith and a self-taught writer—as a proletarian author. Pekkanen had begun his literary career by representing workers and the
reality of the working class, but in his later works, he was regarded as having distanced himself from his earlier views.

During the Continuation War (the hostilities between Finland and the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1944, after the preceding Winter War from 1939 to 1940), key members of the left-wing intelligentsia were imprisoned on charges of desertion and high treason, while many others were taken into preventive detention. After Finland lost the Continuation War, the political situation changed dramatically. Moreover, once the anti-communist laws were repealed in 1944, the Finnish Communist Party could function legally, and several communists became ministers in the first government that was formed after the war. The Finnish People’s Democratic League (SKDL) was founded in 1944 as a political organization with the goal of uniting those who were politically left of the Finnish Social Democratic Party. In the first parliamentary election after the war in 1945, SKDL won forty-nine seats. Many of the left-wing writers and intellectuals joined SKDL and the Communist Party, and Kaisu-Mirjami Rydberg and Cay Sundström were elected to the parliament as representatives of SKDL in 1945 (Kirby 2006, 235).

The post-war years meant an increase in internationalism in Finnish cultural life. The younger generation directed its attention to contemporary European and American modernism, not to the socialist culture that was embraced by the left-wing intellectuals, who themselves turned toward socialist countries in the context of the Cold War. Yet paradoxically, and in spite of the heavy opposition they encountered, the left-wing intellectuals were unique in their own generation in Finland in terms of their internationalization, and this had a permanent impact on cultural exchange.

One of the most influential writers in post-war Finland was Väinö Linna (1920–92). Linna shaped the self-awareness of the Finns by depicting the great historical events of the twentieth century in his novel Tuntematon sotilas (The Unknown Soldier) (1954, translated in 1957, and in 2015 by Liesl Yamaguchi) and the trilogy of novels Täällä Pohjantähden alla (Under the North Star) (1959–63, translated by Richard Impola, 2001–2003). Linna adopted the perspective of crofters, who had joined the Reds in the Civil War, as well as of the ordinary men who fought on the front during the Continuation War of 1941–44. Another acclaimed writer with a working-class background who became one of the most widely read authors in the 1950s and the 1960s was Lauri Viita (1916–65).

The 1960s and the 1970s were a period of revitalization for the realistic and broadly epic working-class novel. The most powerful achievements in this genre
New Research Trends in Finnish Working-Class Literature

were produced by a few male writers with proletarian roots: Hannu Salama, Alpo Ruuth, Lassi Sinkkonen, Samuli Paronen, and Jorma Ojaharju (Laitinen 1991, 560). The revival of the working-class novel can also be linked to a rise in leftist radicalism. Beginning in the mid-1960s, there was a major conflict on the left and within the Communist Party of Finland (SKP). The pro-Soviet internal opposition group, also known as the “Taistoists,” named after their leader Taisto Sinisalo, gained popularity. Even though the heyday of Taistoism was short-lived (it was over by the mid-1970s), many artists, writers, intellectuals, university students, and cultural workers in Finland were committed to its Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism from the late 1960s onwards. As a consequence, Taistoism held a relatively significant position in Finnish culture for a short period. Socialist Realism also became a guiding principle for the Kulttuurivyöntekijäin Liitto (KTL; Cultural Workers’ Union), which was established in 1972. With its romantic revolutionary elements and proletarian heroes, Socialist Realism was implemented wholeheartedly, especially in the visual arts, although it was less popular in literature.

Since the 1980s, Finland has undergone a political-economic transformation to a market-oriented society in which the instruments of producing wealth in capitalist terms tend to develop into ends in themselves. It was precisely in this context of the neoliberal turn that the topic of class reemerged in Finnish literature. Following the economic recession in Finland and since the late 1990s, a handful of Finnish writers—Reko Lundán, Kari Hotakainen, Juha Seppälä, Outi Alm, Hanna Marjut Marttila, Jani Saxell, and, especially, Arto Salminen—have put class differences under serious scrutiny, a phenomenon which Jussi Ojajärvi refers to in this volume as the new emergence of class in Finnish literature (see also Ojajärvi 2006). The context of class in these writings is the neoliberal turn that consists of transnational capitalist processes and a series of political decisions that gave rise to a “new society of competitiveness” (Heiskala and Luhtakallio 2006).

Multidisciplinary Perspectives

The contributors to this issue with a multidisciplinary theme have utilized various source materials, such as published books, unpublished manuscripts, and printed and handwritten newspapers. The archives of working-class writers include objects that reflect their hardships during the Civil War and their conditions in prison camps. Examples of these are the stabbed wallet of Kössi Ahmala and the pieces of cloth on which Hilja Pärssinen wrote her poems in prison.
Elsi Hyttinen, Kati Launis, Milla Peltonen, Veli-Matti Pynttäri, and Jussi Ojajärvi are all literary scholars who are oriented to historical contextualization and class analysis. Hyttinen and Launis, in their chapters, focus on the writers of the early working-class movement at the end of the nineteenth century. Hyttinen studies Elvira Willman’s struggle for working-class authorship, and Launis concentrates on the fictional representations of class that are intertwined with gender and nationality in the works of Kössi Kaatra, Hilja Pärssinen, and Esa Paavo-Kallio. Pynttäri’s article discusses Toivo Pekkanen’s ambivalent status as a proletarian author, and Peltonen presents Hannu Salama, who reformed both the tradition of working-class prose and the realistic novel in the 1960s and the 1970s. Ojajärvi’s article focuses on the re-intensified antagonism of capital and labor in the works of the contemporary writer Arto Salminen.

Mikko Pollari, Hanne Koivisto, and Jaana Torninoja-Latola are cultural historians, and their articles depict the different actors in the field of Finnish working-class literature. Pollari presents Vihtori Kosonen, who, despite his broad range of activities, has remained a relatively unknown figure in Finnish working-class history. Kosonen was a publisher of works that had great geographical and ideological diversity, and he made world literature and contemporary socialist literature available to Finnish workers. Koivisto and Torninoja-Latola both focus on left-wing intellectuals before and after the Second World War. Koivisto’s article depicts the international contacts and the domestic difficulties of left-wing intellectuals; Torninoja-Latola discusses the choices and tensions in the life and literary activities of Elvi Sinervo.

Kirsti Salmi-Niklander is a folklorist who specializes in the interaction of oral and literary culture. Her research on working-class literature began from the community of working-class young people in Karkkila, an industrial town in Southern Finland (Salmi-Niklander 2004, 2007). In her article, Salmi-Niklander focuses on the proletarian decadence and the international influences among young writers active in the Helsinki Social Democratic Youth Society from 1914 to 1918, and their “Decameron Club,” with members such as Kössi Ahmala, Emil Lindahl, and Kasperi Tanttu. These writers had a profound influence on the young working-class people of their time, and intense oral-literary practices were typical of the working-class cultural life of the period.

Today, Finnish working-class literature is alive and well. For example, Arto Salminen dramatized his novel *Varasto* (Warehouse) (1998), and the play had its premiere in the National Theatre in December 2005, very soon after Salminen’s
sudden death. In addition, Varasto has recently been adapted into a feature film (2011). Hannu Salama’s Siinä näkijä missä tekijä (Where there’s a crime there’s a witness) (1972) has been adapted into a televised miniseries (YLE1 2012). Elvira Willman’s long-forgotten play Juopa (The cleft) was also presented by the Tampere Student Theatre in 2008. To attest to the current popularity of working-class literature, Raoul Palmgren’s and Elvi Sinervo’s centenary celebrations attracted capacity audiences at the Library of the Labor Movement in Helsinki in 2012. In addition, the annual Working-Class Literature Day has been organized in Tampere since 2010—another popular event. However, few texts discussed in this volume are available in English translations, with the exception of Toivo Pekkanen’s Lapsuuteni (My Childhood, translated by Alan Blair, University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

As reflected by this collection of articles, research on Finnish working-class literature is also thriving. This special issue of the Journal of Finnish Studies represents the first presentation of Finnish working-class literature in English.

REFERENCES


Heimo, Anne. 2010. Kapina Sammatissa: Vuoden 1918 paikalliset tulkinnat osana historian yhteiskunnallisen rakentamisen prosessia [Rebellion in Sammatti: Local interpretations of the 1918 Finnish Civil War as part of the social process of history making]. Helsinki: SKS.


Hyttinen, Elsi. 2012. Kovaa työtä ja kohtalon oikkuja: Elvira Willmanin kamppailu työläiskirjallisuuden tekijyydestä vuosisadan vaihteen Suomessa [Hard work and twists


Ojajärvi, Jussi. 2006. *Supermarketin valossa: Kapitalismi, subjekti ja minuus Mari Mörön romaanissa “Kiltin yön lahjat” ja Juha Seppälän novellissa “Supermarket”* [In light of the supermarket: Capitalism, the subject, and the self in Mari Mörö’s *Good-night gifts* and Juha Seppälä’s *Supermarket*]. Helsinki: SKS.


New Research Trends in Finnish Working-Class Literature


THE MAKING OF THE FINNISH WORKING CLASS
IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY WORKING-CLASS LITERATURE

Kati Launis
University of Turku

ABSTRACT
Working-class literature was one of the cultural areas that defined social class in early twentieth-century Finland. As a starting point for this article, it stems from E. P. Thompson’s key points: first, the working class was active in its own making, and, second, that class needs to be understood as a relationship between people. In the present article, I consider how the working class is represented and valued in poems, newspaper articles, labor-movement songs, novels, and political leaflets written by Kössi Kaatra, Hilja Pärssinen, and Esa Paavo-Kallio—three working-class writers in whose works we witness the various discourses on class as well as the different genres of working-class writing. As I will show here, the representations of the working class created by these writers are in conflict with the hegemonic discourses on class, and these representations are produced through processes that include gender and nationality.

INTRODUCTION
In The Making of the English Working Class—a 1963 classic of English social history and working-class studies—E. P. Thompson highlights the active role of the working class in England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. He describes the life experiences of ordinary people—people of low social status—who nevertheless created a culture and political consciousness of great vitality. According to Thompson ([1963] 1984, 8), the working class “did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present in its own making.”
Thompson was describing English popular and underground traditions at the turn of the nineteenth century. My focus is on fictional representations of class in Finnish working-class literature about one hundred years later (1895–1918). My starting point, however, stems from a similar conception of “making” class, along with an understanding of class as a historical phenomenon, as something that actually takes place in human relationships, and that is constantly made and valued in everyday practices (cf. Thompson [1963] 1984, 8; Skeggs 2004).

In Finland, the literary scholar Aimo Roininen (1993) has pointed to the importance of the working-class literary institution, which was tightly linked with the development of the working-class movement and the press. This institution offered a route to the public sphere for people who did not have one before. At that moment in history, “ground-floor people” opened their mouths and began to depict the world from the “point of view of the backyard,” as Kössi Kaatra, one of the authors discussed here, puts it. However, all the writers of the early working-class movement in Finland were not lower class by birth. There were also writers, such as Hilja Pärssinen, to be discussed later in the article, who came from educated classes but were ideologically committed to the movement (Roininen 1999, 92; of the definition of the term working-class author, see Elsi Hyttinen’s article in this volume).

The literary production of class—the definition of working class, in a dialectical relationship with the upper classes—is, in other words, at the core of the tradition of working-class literature. The tradition offered a territory for negotiating the meanings of class and for casting a powerful light on the class structure of Finnish society at the turn of the twentieth century. The literary scholar Magnus Nilsson has stressed the point that representations of class in Swedish working-class literature must be examined in relation to the tradition of working-class writing. According to Nilsson, the existence of this tradition has given writers legitimacy for the production of subaltern, radical discourses on class. For this reason, the tradition is always in conflict with hegemonic discourses, such as that of nationalism, which attempt to deny the significance of class—or, in the case of more recent discourses, the common view that class distinctions no longer exist (Nilsson 2011).

In the following pages, I ask how the working class is represented and valued in Finnish working-class literature at the beginning of the twentieth century. What kinds of discourses on class do these writers produce, and what do they perhaps resist? Among the approximately one hundred and fifty writers in this group (see Roininen 1999, 92), I have chosen three in whose writings we witness the different discourses on class—collective emotions of joy and pride, and the intersections of
class, gender, and nationality—as well as the different genres of working-class writing, such as poems, autobiographical novels, and political leaflets. These writers are Kössi Kaatra (1882–1928; until 1906 Lindström), the “court poet” of the movement; Hilja Pärssinen (1876–1935; pseudonym Hilja Liinamaa), a teacher, poet, representative of the Social Democratic Party in Parliament, and the leader of the Women Workers’ Union in Finland, which she made international with her activities; and Esa Paavo-Kallio (1858–1936), a bohemian poet and lay preacher.

The “Narrative of Misery” as a Political Tool

Working-class literature was not an isolated “island” of its own but part of the wider literary tradition. Of earlier writers, the realist Minna Canth was, in particular, favored by working-class writers. Writers before Canth (for instance, J. L. Runeberg, the famous poet of the mid-nineteenth century) had already depicted poor, common people. Working-class writers, however, re-wrote this earlier, Runebergian, idealistic tradition, rejecting his conception of a submissive people and replacing it with that of defiant citizens.

In the poems and prose of Kaatra, Pärssinen, and Paavo-Kallio, the story of the miserable present of the workers flows as a self-evident undercurrent. Pärssinen, for example, favors a plot describing the suffering and death of a working-class woman: factory worker, prostitute, or seamstress. The same type of fate is found in the writings in the magazine Työläisenaiten (Working woman). Under the heading “Female victims,” readers found stories of ill, hungry women who became prostitutes. Thus, moral and social teachings were promoted by way of individual destinies (Oittinen 2002, 98).

This “narrative of misery” favored in working-class writing is based on historical reality, and at the same time on the political nature of this writing: flaws had to be shown so that something could be done about them. The tradition offered the writers certain conventional plots (for example, dying women) and an effective, sentimental rhetoric, along with the possibility of representing workers and the working class as suffering victims—or, on the other hand, as idealized working-class heroes and a hope for the future. The working class is represented as distinct from the middle or upper class that gets a role of a heartless robber. In the writings of Pärssinen, Kaatra, and Paavo-Kallio, workers suffer from “forced labor and forced hunger,” drinking problems, bad living conditions, illness, and prostitution. Society is divided into two groups, exploiters and the exploited; the misery of the latter, writes Kaatra ([1906] 1978, 153), is “the condition for happiness” of the former.
The context of the definition of class (in the quotations above and below) is the capitalist system, based on the private ownership of the means of production. This view became dominant among the leaders of the Finnish working-class movement in the late nineteenth century, when Marxist-Kautskyan socialism attained a hegemonic position in it (Soikkanen 1961, 83). In her poem “Karl Marxin julistus” (Karl Marx’s declaration), Hilja Pärssinen demands that the poor must unite their power:

But a man, a friend of the poor,  
began to investigate that [the reason for the wrong social system].  
He saw the wrong and the reasons  
for oppression in the system  
and the man, Karl Marx, went on to pronounce  
his verdict on capitalism.  
He proclaimed: unite, you poor,  
you millions in all countries  
and rise by the force of your union  
you will win justice!1

Another basic tenet of Marxism—that societies progress through class struggle from capitalism to socialism—is also present in the writings. The workers’ rise to power is a natural law against which it is pointless to fight. Esa Paavo-Kallio compares a socialist society to “a land of our children” and “a land of hope” with peaceful shores. The narrative of misery is thus paralleled by that of a happy future, a better world, which will come true by way of the class struggle.

Socialist society is thus something to anticipate. But the works discussed here also contain happiness, joy, and pride, taking place here and now. This collective experience of belonging (to a certain class) is expressed in Kaatra’s autobiographical novel, Äiti ja poika: Kuvaus köyhäinkorttelista (Mother and son: A picture of the quarter of the poor, 1924), which describes the joyous “awakening” of the Finnish working class. For Kaatra, the stirring experience of belonging to a certain class, the working class, was an essential stimulus to authorship.

1 “– Mut miesi, hän ystävä köyhien / tuot’ yltyvi tutkimahan. / Hän järjestelmässä vääryyttä / ja sorron syitä näki / ja mies, Karl Marx kävi lausumaan / kapitalismille tuomiota. / Hän julisti: köyhät te yhtykkää, / te miljonat joka maassa / ja nouskaa liittonne voimalla / te voitatte oikeuden!” (Pärssinen 1908, 4–5) All poems have been translated by Viola Parente-Čapková.
FROM THE BACKYARD: THE JOY AND PRIDE OF BEING A WORKER

Damn it! It was not a matter of a single individual; it was a matter of a whole class.2

The story behind Kössi Kaatra’s authorship was similar to the story behind many other (but not all) writers of the early working-class movement in Finland. He came from poor conditions, among the so-called common people, as well as did, for instance, Kasperi Tanttu, Kössi Ahmala, and Konrad Lehtimäki. Kaatra’s father died when he was a child, and he had to support himself delivering newspapers before school, running errands, and working in restaurants and shops.

During his short time in a law office, Kaatra began to write. His first poems were published in newspapers. His first collection, Kynnyksellä (On the threshold), came out in 1903, when Kaatra was twenty-one years old. At the time, his model was the most famous Finnish poet of the era, Eino Leino. Kaatra published several collections of poetry, as well as prose works. He also wrote newspaper articles and worked as a journalist for the magazine Kansan tahto (Will of the people). He became a notable working-class writer; according to Palmgren (1966, 314), he was the most important of the old working-class movement.

The turning points for Kaatra’s authorship were the same as those for the whole country: the General Strike of 1905 and the Civil War of 1918. He took an active part in the events of the strike and became a “poet of the masses,” as he writes in his novel Äiti ja poika. Following the strike, he published two collections of poetry. This was followed by almost ten years of silence as a poet. During this period he worked as a theatre director and a shopkeeper. He also published a series of books called “Markan kirjasto” (Penny library), offering translations of such authors as Strindberg, Dostoevsky, London, Tolstoy, and Sinclair (Roininen 1993, 373). During the Civil War, Kaatra lived in Oulu, a town in Northern Finland; when the city was conquered by the Whites, he hid in the attics of houses. He later succeeded in escaping to Sweden, where he spent the rest of his life, publishing poems and prose works.

In Sweden, Kaatra also published his autobiographical novel Äiti ja poika, dedicated to the memory of his mother. It is the story of a working-class boy who awakes into class-consciousness and becomes a poet. It is also a story of the relationship between a working-class mother and her son, referred to as “the boy”; this may have

2 “Lempo soikoon: tässä ei ollut kysymyksessä ainoastaan jotkut yksilöt, tässä oli kysymys kokonaisesta luokasta” (Kaatra 1924, 8).
been used as a device to distance the novel from the author’s own life and highlight its fictional character—thus narrating a story between the fictional and the autobiographical (Leskelä-Kärki 2008). On a larger scale, the novel describes the hard life of working-class people and of extreme poverty. But it is also a critical analysis of a society divided into two groups: the rich and poor, the upper class and lower class.

In his novel, Kaatra describes a life that has no room for such “spiritual” things as art or writing. The educated class and the common folk are separated by a whole lifestyle. Working at the restaurant, the main character, the young “boy,” examines the class differences that are clearly visible. The “better people” sit on their own side, drink expensive drinks, smell of soap, and speak Swedish; the Finnish-speaking common folk sit on the “worse side” of the restaurant and drink beer. As Kaatra points out, class is not merely an economic matter; it also involves culture, daily practices, and lifestyle. In terms of the well-known theory of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu ([1979] 1984, 372–96), educated people distinguish themselves from the common folk by understanding the value of various expensive drinks and by speaking and behaving in a certain class-specific way. The upper- and lower-class actors in this passage of Kaatra’s novel, however, are connected by one characteristic: on both sides of the restaurant, people drink too much. Intoxication serves as a kind of “social glue,” momentarily binding people from different classes together—until the police arrive; they know very well, as Kaatra ironically puts it, who is to be arrested and who is to be left alone to go home in peace.

Thus Kaatra demonstrates the oppressiveness of a poverty that cannot be escaped. But there are some rays of light in the boy’s life too, certain small things that contribute to his growth as a writer: a coachman who tells the little boy and his friends Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales, the hymn book the boy has to read to his sick, dying father, and a theater performance of Aleksis Kivi’s Nummisuutarit (1864) (Heath Cobblers, translated by Douglas Robinson). One significant factor contributing to the boy’s future as a writer is his poor health. During his childhood years, when he has to work hard, he contracts tuberculosis. This forces him to think about options other than manual labor—such as writing.

Everything changes, Kaatra writes in his novel, when the boy receives two “visitors.” One of these is the idea that people from the “poor quarter” are not alone

---

3 Äiti ja poika is based on Kaatra’s own life (see also Palmgren 1966, 341). It can be called an autobiographical novel. Autobiography was a popular genre among workers in nineteenth-century England and France, published in book form or in newspapers or as a brief introduction to a collection of poems (Lyons 2008, 111–38; cf. Veli-Matti Pynttäri’s article in this volume).
but belong to a certain class, the working class. The other visitor is the Muse, the spirit of poetry. This visit is by no means surprising: according to Kaatra, the common people have always had artistic talent. The Muse “has always dwelt in low cottages; together with trouble and slavery” (1924, 92).

The boy begins to express his individual suffering from the “viewpoint of the back yard”: he begins to write poetry. As a poet, he calls himself a little bird, a sparrow, who doesn’t think much of himself. His first collection of poems, Kynnyksellä (On the threshold) (1903), came, as Kaatra says, out of the “barren soil.” Writing becomes the purpose of the boy’s life. But it also causes new, material worries: it takes about ten years before his writing earns him even the price of the paper he writes on.

An important turning point is when the boy realizes that the private sorrows of the individual are not enough to serve as the content of poetry. He begins to express the feelings of the working class as a whole. This is something that became a distinctive mark of working-class literature. In Äiti ja poika, Kaatra depicts the rise of the working class as an inspiring process during which workers “wipe the sleep” from their eyes and awake to the consciousness of the power of the masses:

At that time it [the working class] had just wiped the sleep from its eyes and began to stretch its legs. In its new sense of power it was full of the joy of exertion and victory. It suddenly stepped forward with flutes and cymbals and irresistibly carried with it all those who had not yet been broken down by their troubles.

And there was a great upheaval in individuals. It was not enough to reach for the mercy of the heartless system from behind one’s own hammer, spindle, plough, sewing [machine]. Today you got a job, but if you complained, you were free to go into the street the next day. We had to strive together.4

Kössi Kaatra was not writing in a land of freedom. His authorship was connected to such factors as class and male gender—there were only a few female working-class

4 “Siihen aikaan se [työväenluokka] oli juuri saanut unen silmistään ja alkoi oikoa jäseniään. Vasta voimansatunton pääseenä uhkui se ponnistuksen iloa ja voitonvarmuutta. Se astui yhtä-akkiä esille huiluin ja sympaaleine ja veti vastustamattomasti mukaansa jokaisen, jota vaiva ei vielä ollut ehtinyt runnellta loppuun.

Ja yksilöissä tapahtui suuri mullistus. Tässä ei käynyt laatuun kurkoitella oman vasaransa, kehrävartensa, auransa, ompeluksensa takaa ynseän järjestelmän armoa. Tänään sait työtä, mutta
writers, and the best-known among them belonged to the educated classes (Launis 2009, 85; see also Salmi-Niklander 2010, 20–41); his authorship was connected to the development of the field of working-class literature and its explicitly political nature, and also to literary conventions and rhetoric. Kaatra’s autobiographical novel offers one answer to the question of how it was possible for a man like him, without education, often without food or money, to become a writer.

In his novel, Kaatra describes not only the process of becoming a working-class author but also the process whereby class “happens,” i.e., takes place, at a certain historical moment, as a result of common experience, or, as Thompson puts it, “when some men [sic], as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs” ([1963] 1984, 8). Kaatra describes the experience of awakening to a new communal identity, and the feelings of pride and joy that followed. This—the experience of the power of the masses, the new class identity—was, according to Kaatra, an important part of “making” class in those days of radical changes in Finnish society.

Strong feelings are equally present when Hilja Pärssinen, a well-known and influential poet and politician in the working-class cultural and political field in those days, discusses the entanglement of class, gender, and citizenship. For Pärssinen, working-class women were “sister slaves,” who needed to be raised up “from the swamp of misery.”

**Sister Slave: Class, Gender, Citizenship**

In 1906, Finnish women became the first in Europe to gain the right to vote and to be eligible for public office. The Women Workers’ Union, established in 1900, actively campaigned for women’s suffrage. At the time, the leader of the Union was Hilja Pärssinen, poet, teacher, and future representative of the Social Democratic Party in the first Parliament. Like another female working-class writer, Elvira Willman, discussed by Elsi Hyttinen in this volume, Pärssinen came from the educated classes. The daughter of a clergyman and a teacher, she spoke many languages and was responsible for the international contacts of the Women’s Workers’ Union. Her family background, education, and lifestyle—including a beautiful “cultural home” in Helsinki (Kilpi 1967, 158)—bound her powerfully to the educated classes. She

jos mutisit, sait huomenna lähteä kadulle. Tässä oli pyriittävä yhdessä.” (Kaatra 1924, 97–98, translated by Kati Launis)

5 Pärssinen’s short biography is written by Sylvi-Kyllikki Kilpi (1967, 123–61), Elvi Sinervo’s sister. Sinervo is discussed by Jaana Torninoja-Latola in this volume.
was not herself one of the common people; rather, she represented them—including as a member of Parliament.

At the heart of both Pärssinen’s political activity and her literary production—including several collections of poetry, individual poems and articles in newspapers, translations (for example, of Heinrich Heine’s poems), and political leaflets—was the position of working-class women and children (see Launis 2008). The figure of the working-class woman is strongly present in her collection Taistelon tuoksinasta (From the turmoil of the struggle, 1907), published during an election year, and remains there down to the collections Jälleen vapaana (Free again, 1923) and Muistojen mailta (From the lands of memories, 1926) published after her release from the Hämeenlinna women’s prison, where she was held for political reasons from 1918 to 1923. In prison, lacking paper, she wrote her poems on various pieces of cloth (which I have touched and read at the Labor Archives, where they are stored). Many of these poems are tinged with loyalty and love for her fellow prisoners.

In her writings, Pärssinen genders the class issue. She transforms the “brother-talk” and masculinity typical of the working-class movement into “sister-talk.” Pärssinen reveals the subordinate position of working-class women, who, according to her, live in slavery and occupy the “lowest step” of society. She shows that in the case of working-class women the social categories of class and gender intersect in the worst possible way, resulting in a subordinate social position. According to Pärssinen (and many of her contemporaries in the Women’s Workers’ Union), it was harder to be a working-class woman than a working-class man—or a woman “of the rotten upper class.” Pärssinen called working-class women’s condition a “three-fold stress”; they were forced to take care of the home and the children but also to work outside the home (1909). For women, wage-work in a factory or on a building site was a matter not of emancipation but of necessity.

This emphasis, Pärssinen’s central political message, can be seen in the leaflet Taistele ville siskoille: Mietteitä äänioikeus-asiasta (To the fighting sisters: Thoughts about the right to vote, 1906). The aim of the leaflet—a thin booklet of a couple of pages, used for purposes of political agitation in the Women’s Workers’ Union—was to encourage working-class women to fight for their right to vote:

Sister slave! [. . .] You are just like a plank drowning in the swamp of misery, along which the fortunate are walking; you are the lowest step

---

6 One of her collections, Musta virta (Black tide, 1913), was published in the United States by Työmie Kustannusyhtiö, Hancock, Michigan.
they are trampling. Your life is joyless and gloomy. Your cottage is dark. Narrow and dusty is the corner where you try to rest, exhausted by hard work. [. . .] Rise up from slavery! Out of the swamp of misery, we hear the cry of tens of thousands of people even in our small country. [. . .] The women of the rotten upper class are not willing to be fervent, to sacrifice. But we want to show that we are ready to fight until we win. Let us swear that we won’t stop in our demands until we have the vote and eligibility for all women. Harder and harder, hand in hand, to the battle!  

The rhetoric of the leaflet is powerful and emotional. It is familiar from the rhetoric that recurs in the countless writings and speeches of working-class activists (see Soikkanen 1961, 358–59): slave, swamp of misery, rotten upper class. The leaflet includes a narrative of awakening, emancipation, and rise from the lowest social position to that of an active female citizen. The driving forces of this kind of writing were emotional: the aim of the leaflet was to impact the emotions of the reader (or listener) and to make her act (see also Ehrnrooth 1992). In a Swedish context, Beata Agrell (2003) has shown that working-class writers in the early twentieth century, such as Maria Sandel and Karl Östman, used ideological and didactic ways of writing; the aim was to affect the readers and to “awaken” them. In this sense, the labor movement, according to Agrell, was also a secular form of revivalist movements. This arose out of a new way of reading (for example, of the Bible) introduced by revivalist movements: reading in order to understand.  

The ideal working-class woman, as constructed in Pärssinen’s writings, is first and foremost a political citizen, with her rights and duties (of citizenship). This image of the working-class woman—who, according to Pärssinen’s poem “Naisesta” (About a woman) is “active and free in her soul” (1907, 38–39)—recalls the ideas of the German socialist August Bebel. In his work Die Frau und der Sozialismus (1879), first published in Finnish in 1904, Bebel argues for the improvement of the position of women and highlights the long history of women’s subordination: according to

Bebel, women were the first human creatures to be kept in slavery ([1879] 1907, 97).

Pärssinen’s poems contain yet another dimension, which is particularly interesting in the context of the hegemonic discourses of the time: the dimension linked to the respectability of working-class women. The poem “Kohtaus äitien kokouksessa” (A scene from a meeting of mothers, 1913, 64), for example, depicts a working-class mother who gives a speech at a meeting while at the same time she breastfeeds her baby, who calmly suckles its mother’s “holy milk.” Another poem, “Pieni punaorpo” (The little Red orphan, 1923, 25–26), written in prison, tells about children whose father has died in the Civil War and whose mother is in prison. In the poem, the mother’s face has “a saintly gleam”; the children are compared to birds who have lost their nest. The poem “Aamutuokio” (Morning moment, 1926, 32), likewise written in prison, depicts a young female prisoner, probably a prostitute, who is pregnant. After giving birth to her baby, she too has a divine gleam—she becomes “a holy virgin”:

But now she is a holy virgin  
on her bed of motherhood.  
Even though the door was still barred  
the angel came from the heaven.8

Holiness and working-class motherhood—this combination recurs in Pärssinen’s poems. These representations of the captive Red widow and of the prostitute as holy, almost Madonna-like, figures differ radically from the hegemonic discourse of the time, in which working-class women were seen as suspicious and of loose morals (see Markkola 2002, 221). After the Civil War, this view was confirmed in recurrent imagery in the literature of the victorious Whites; the women of the Red Guard were represented as depraved and cruel. For example, Kyösti Wilkuna in Kun kansa nousee (When the people rise up, 1918) depicts the Reds as “atavistic monsters” who engage in orgies with their Red “love sisters”; the latter spread venereal diseases. In Helsingin valloitus (The conquest of Helsinki, 1918), Eino Leino flinches from Red women who are presented as raw, insane, and bodily deformed. Probably the most extreme description is Ilmari Kianto’s article in the magazine Keskisuomalainen. According to Kianto, the war is a wolf hunt in which the best target is a female wolf (the Red woman): “the hunter knows that the female wolf will give birth to cubs

8 “Mut nyt hän neitsyt on pyhä / noin äitiysvuoteellaan. / Ovi vaikk’ oli teljetty yhä, / tuli enkeli taivaastaan.” (Pärssinen 1926, 32)
that are just bad, who will wage eternal resistance” (See Koskela 1999, 222–35; Hakala 2006, 122–23).

When we place these two discourses—on the one hand, the image of the hypersexualized Red woman (and working-class women more broadly) and, on the other hand, Pärssinen’s saintly working-class “madonna”—side by side, the difference is clear. Representations of class in Pärssinen’s poems, intertwined with gender, are in conflict with the hegemonic discourses of class in the literary sphere, which, especially after the Civil War, was almost totally controlled by the victorious White side. In Pärssinen’s poem, the orphans’ mother is not a female wolf but a suffering, saintly “virgin.” Her children are not wolf cubs but birds whose nest has been destroyed. In Pärssinen’s poems, the working class is not represented as culturally inferior, sexualized, threatening, or unworthy of respect—as it has been and still is, for example, in Britain, as the sociologist Beverley Skeggs ([1997] 2002, 1–5) has convincingly shown—but on the contrary, as deserving of respect. Pärssinen, in other words, creates counter-imagery to the hegemonic class discourse that asserted the immorality and complete lack of decency of working-class women.

As a literary scholar, I have highlighted here Pärssinen’s role as a poet. Historical research, on the other hand, has focused on her role as a politician. As Marjaliisa Hentilä (1989) and Maria Lähteenmäki (1989) have pointed out, Pärssinen established contacts between Finnish and other European Women’s Workers’ Unions, especially in Germany and Britain. She also established good relations with the German socialist theorist and leader Clara Zetkin, and acted as Finland’s correspondent for the magazine Die Gleichheit, which Zetkin edited. Pärssinen’s correspondence with Zetkin provided the basis for the action of the Women’s Workers’ Union in Finland. Pärssinen also knew Alexandra Kollontai, the Russian politician and Soviet Ambassador to Norway, with whom she studied the organizing of social help for mothers and children during her study tour to England (Hentilä 1989; Lähteenmäki 1989, 142–46).

**FINNS OR WORKERS? CITIZENSHIP AND CLASS IN NEGOTIATION**

It is clear that working-class writers demanded political civil rights for workers, including the right to vote, and with that right, the chance to help determine matters that directly concerned their own lives. The opening up to workers of political citizenship received daring expression during the General Strike in the “Red Declaration” (Punainen julistus) (Pollari et al. 2008, 47, 52). With the parliamentary reform of 1906, in which the Diet of Finland (based on the Estates) was replaced
by a modern unicameral Parliament of two hundred representatives, citizenship was defined in a new way, independent of the individual’s social class. The number of enfranchised citizens multiplied almost tenfold in a single night; both maid and master were now able to vote, although, for example, those under guardianship and those sentenced for vagrancy were still excluded from the franchise, and the voting age was twenty-four years.

A more complex issue is the relationship between class and nationality, as represented in the writings of working-class writers. Was there any “Finnishness” for them to identify with, considering that their aim was specifically to break down the idea of a uniform national identity, independent of class? For example, Zacharias Topelius’s classic schoolbook, *Boken om vårt land* (Book of our country, 1875), written in the spirit of the national awakening, aimed specifically at instilling a love of the home country into its young readers and to propagandize for a united Finnish nation. The labor movement, on the other hand, was an international movement, promoting the interests of a group of people, the workers, in different countries. This makes me wonder if the “imagined community” constructed in the works of the writers of the movement was a nation at all (cf. Anderson [1983] 2006, 5–6). While Topelius offered his readers a unified Finland, what did working-class writers offer? Was their “cultural home” a nation or, more likely, an international working class, an identity that transcended national borders? Did workers define themselves by class rather than nationality?

One answer to the question is found in the writings of Esa Paavo-Kallio, where the question recurs. While Kaatra and Pärssinen, discussed above, were and still are familiar names to some extent, Paavo-Kallio has been almost totally forgotten, both as a writer and as an actor in history. The only scholars who have studied Paavo-Kallio’s life and writings thoroughly are Palmgren (1966, 89–98) and, recently, Hannu Suni (2014). Paavo-Kallio was a bohemian of his own time, a writer and teacher who has ended up in the margins of history as a notorious and exceptional case (see, e.g., *Turun lehti* 1896). He was active in the temperance movement, the evangelical movement, and the labor movement; he founded a Baptist congregation and acted in various localities as a lay preacher, an estate steward, and a teacher. He was rejected by all these movements because of internal conflicts (and possibly because of his contrary personality). Throughout his life, Paavo-Kallio wrote, publishing, mainly at his own expense, collections of poems, songbooks for workers, stories, religious writings, and newspaper articles (see Launis 2011).
In Paavo-Kallio’s writings, the working class is represented as distinct from the upper class in the capitalist system, which he constantly criticizes. This representation undercuts the image of a unified nation as constructed by the educated classes from the mid-nineteenth century onward. In an article published in the magazine Työmies (Worker) in November 1900, Paavo-Kallio criticizes Topelius’s *Boken om vårt land*, which, according to Paavo-Kallio, closes its eyes to the evils of society. It is a useless “magic book of the tricks of patriotic beliefs,” which merely serves to arouse “national and race rage” (Paavo-Kallio 1900).

A few years later, in the lyrics he wrote for the labor-movement song “Uusi marssi” (New march, 1908), Paavo-Kallio denies the whole idea of the fatherland. In the song, written to be sung to the tune of the Finnish regional song “Kymmenen virran maa” (Land of the ten rivers), he depicts Finland as “a pale land of slavery and misery.” He turns the original, idealized words of the song ironically into their opposite:

> I can’t recite poems or sing about the fatherland,
> My song does not sing about my country,
> My harp rings the tune of misery,
> It is stained by the dirt of drudgery;
> It inebriates my mind with agony
> This pale country, full of slavery and misery.9

In labor-movement songs written by Paavo-Kallio, the Finnish flag, the nation’s most significant symbol, is replaced by the red flag waving on the roof of the workers’ hall. Religion, too, becomes the subject of carnivalistic irony and laughter. Paavo-Kallio, the earlier preacher of the evangelical movement, makes use of the Bible, widely used as an intertext by working-class writers, linking its familiar phrases with new comic connections. He equips concepts such as *religion*, *native country*, and *state* with quotation marks, thus evoking their ambiguous character as cultural constructions.

Paavo-Kallio’s attitude toward the significance of the fatherland, however, is not completely hostile; rather, it is ambivalent. In his writings, he either denies the whole idea of the fatherland or expresses a passionate love toward it. The answer to the question asked above—whether it was nation or class that was the “home” of the

---

9 “Isänmaasta en lausua, laulella voi, / Ei helky mun lauluni maasta, / Vaan kurjuuden kieltä mun harppuni soi, / Sen on kannela raastannan saasta; / se mun mieltäni tuskilla juovuttaa / Tämä orjuuden, kurjuuden kalpea maa.” (Paavo-Kallio 1908, 12)
working-class writer’s cultural identity—lies, in his case and probably more broadly in the working-class literature of the time, somewhere in between: Paavo-Kallio wanted to have a reformed, egalitarian Finnish society with the working class as its driving force. This attitude, combining nationalistic sentiment with the internationalism of socialism, has been called “class policy within the nation” (Heikkilä 1993), and it is discussed by Mikko Pollari in this volume. According to Paavo-Kallio, there is nothing wrong with love for one’s native land; however, Finland must change before one can recognize it as one’s own country. His solution, at that specific historical, cultural, and political moment, was to name Finland the motherland, that is, to change the word fatherland into its feminine form (see, e.g., Paavo-Kallio 1908, 79–80). For Paavo-Kallio, Finland is a motherland or a children’s land—the future socialist society waiting at the end of the coming class war.

THE LITERARY PRODUCTION OF CLASS IN FINNISH WORKING-CLASS LITERATURE

What does it mean to be a worker? What kind of cultural, historical meanings of working class are produced in Finnish working-class literature? In the writings of Esa Paavo-Kallio, Hilja Pärssinen, and Kössi Kaatra, we witness different answers to these questions.

For all the three writers, class is, first and foremost, a category that is made in the context of the capitalist system. The system is wrong, they argue, and must be changed: the poor must unite their power, as Pärssinen writes in her poem “Karl Marx’s Declaration.” The working class is represented as distinct from the “rotten upper class,” which performs the role of a heartless “capitalist” and “profiteer.”

The writers also have different emphases. Kaatra expresses the collective, joyous experience of belonging to the working class: the rise of the working class is a process during which workers awake to the consciousness of the power of the masses. He also shows that class is not merely an economic matter; it also includes daily practices and lifestyle. Pärssinen, poet and politician of the working-class women, discusses the entanglements of class, gender, and citizenship. She shows that in the case of working-class women the social categories of class and gender intersect in the worst possible way, resulting in a subordinate social position. Paavo-Kallio, in turn, ponders the question of the relationship between class and nationalist ideology. Does the cultural identity of the worker belong to the nation or the class? The answer to this (most topical) question lies somewhere in between: he wanted to have a reformed Finnish society with the working class as its active agent.
The writings discussed here prove the significance of the tradition of working-class literature: it offered a specific, cultural territory within which class distinctions and frontiers were made visible, and the cultural, historical meanings of class were constructed and analyzed. The tradition offered the writers certain conventional plots and an effective, sentimental rhetoric, along with the possibility of representing workers and the working class as suffering victims—or, on the other hand, as idealized working-class heroes with a hope for the future.

References


Markkola, 162–85. Tampere: Vastapaino.


Liinamaa, Hilja. See Pärssinen, Hilja.

Liinamaa-Pärssinen, Hilja. See Pärssinen, Hilja.


Palmgren, Raoul. 1966. *Joukkosydän I: Varhaisen työväenliikkeemme kaunokirjallisuus* [The collective heart I: The literature of our old working-class movement]. Porvoo: WSOY.


———. 1909. “Synnyttäjäin suojelus ja äitiysvakuutus” [Protecting pregnant women and maternal insurance ]. *Kansan kalenteri* [The people’s almanac].


——— [Hilja Liinamaa-Pärssinen, pseud.]. 1923. *Jälleen vapaana* [Free again].
The Making of the Finnish Working Class in Early Twentieth-Century Working-Class Literature

Helsinki: Työväen Sanomalehti Osakeyhtiö.

———. 1926. *Muistojen mailta* [From the lands of memories]. Helsinki: Kansanvalta.


Soikkanen, Hannu. 1961. *Sosialismin tulo Suomeen ensimmäisiin yksikamarisen eduskunnan vaaleihin asti* [The arrival of socialism into Finland until the first parliamentary elections]. Porvoo: WSOY.


Wilkuna, Kyösti. 1918. *Kun kansa nousee: Muistelmia ja kokemuksia Suomen vapausso-dasta* [When the people rise up: Recollections and experiences from Finland’s Civil War]. Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Kirja.
THE LITERALLY INTERNATIONAL ADVENTURES
OF VIHTORI KOSONEN

Mikko Pollari
University of Tampere

ABSTRACT
The role of Finnish working-class publishing houses in disseminating international influences to a working-class readership is still a notably under-researched subject. This article deals with one of the unsung heroes of the trade, Vihtori Kosonen, whose vibrant publishing activity between 1907 and 1910 markedly enriched the field of Finnish working-class literature. The life of Kosonen also serves to highlight geographical mobility and international contacts as features of the early Finnish working-class movement.

INTRODUCTION
Which literary figure of the early Finnish working-class movement was responsible for publishing approximately eighty works originating from ten different countries? Who was the first editor of the first prominent Finnish working-class newspaper in North America? Who led the organization to aid refugee Russian revolutionaries in Tampere, Finland, during the turbulent times following the Great Strike of 1905? The list of Vihtori Kosonen’s deeds could go on, but these examples give an idea of its scope. However, despite his fervent activity, Kosonen is a relatively unknown figure in Finnish working-class history. Thus far, he has not been the subject of a dedicated study, and information about him must be gathered from scattered sources. Perhaps this lack of interest reflects the fact that Kosonen was never an ideological innovator or a long-standing political leader. He might best be viewed as a facilitator, a practical and financial figure. His career as a publisher is well worth highlighting in the context of Finnish working-class literature.

1 The article was written as a part of the project “The Transnational Connections of Finnish Literary Culture,” funded by the Kone Foundation.
The only biographical description of Kosonen that I have found—aside from a short memoir written by Kosonen himself, to which I will return later on—is a short entry in the Finnish Kuka kukin on (Who’s who) from the year 1908. It tells us that Kosonen was a publisher from Helsinki, born on November 6, 1873, in Kesälahti. He had first studied in realityseo (secondary school) in Savonlinna in Eastern Finland for four years, before continuing his studies privately. He had also spent six years in the military, aiming at an officer’s career, but was expelled because of his revolutionary opinions. At the time the entry was written, he had been in the newspaper trade for five years, including two years in the United States, where he had also acted as a traveling lecturer. According to the entry, Kosonen owned a printing press and a publishing company (Kuka kukin on 1909, 1908, 176).

Some years after this entry, Kosonen vanishes from the public sphere. He is not included in the next editions of the Kuka kukin on (now with the title Aikalaiskirja [Book of contemporaries] 1920, 1933, 1941), and his subsequent endeavors are not recorded in Finnish working-class histories either. The last trace of his movements that I have thus far found comes from 1932, when he was working for Suomen Kuoroliitto (The Finnish Choir Association) in Helsinki (Pajamo 1982, 52). At that point, his days as a working-class agitator were far behind him.

The focus of this article is on the years of Kosonen’s intensive involvement with the Finnish labor movement. In the following pages, I will present three episodes from his life, each of which depicts a different aspect of his international activity and connections. Each episode highlights an aspect of the various international influences in the early Finnish working-class movement: the trans-Atlantic contacts between Finnish and Finnish American workers; the interaction of Finnish social democrats with revolutionaries from other parts of the Russian Empire; and the international influences disseminated to the Finnish working-class audience through working-class publishing. And there shall be suspense, too: in the case of Kosonen, historical contextualization means tales of revolutionary action, near escapes, and even a furious shoot-out.

A Trans-Atlantic Agitator

The July 13, 1903, issue of the leading Finnish working-class newspaper, Työmies (The Worker), included a letter from New York, reporting on a lecture by Finnish socialist Matti Kurikka that was banned by local authorities on account of his supposed anarchism (Kosonen 1903a). The writer of the letter was Vihtori Kosonen, the former financial manager of Työmies, who only a few months earlier had been
working in Kotka, in Southern Finland, as the subeditor of the newspaper Kotkan Sanomat (News from Kotka) (“Sanomalehdet” 1903). Now Kosonen was on the other side of the Atlantic, where his name had only a few days earlier appeared above the title of editor for the sample issue of a new Finnish American newspaper, Amerikan Suomalainen Työmies (The Finnish American worker) (Toimitus 1903).

This sudden change of location was striking, but nothing unheard-of at the time. For the members of the Finnish labor movement, the first years of the twentieth century were a time of unprecedented migration, mostly directed to North America. Between 1880 and 1920, almost 300,000 people left Finland for North America, and over half of this emigration happened in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century. At first the flow of migrants was mostly westward, but later the Atlantic became more of a two-way street: about one-third of those who left eventually returned to Finland, bringing with them the experiences and impressions acquired during their time on the American continent (Kero 1997, 13–14; Haapala 2007, 54).

According to Kosonen’s own recollection, written down in 1931 and now stored in the National Archives of Finland, the reason for his emigration was his activity in the resistance against the so-called russification measures in Finland. Kosonen writes that he was especially active in propagandizing against the conscription law of 1901, which was viewed by the Finnish resistance as illegal. Kosonen traveled as a speaker to promote draft strikes among the youth of Southern Finland. Most of all, he spread the word among the members of the working class, as he was a member of the labor party (Kosonen 1931).

His work for the resistance came to a halt in the late winter of 1903, when he was advised by the leaders of the resistance to flee Finland, as he was under threat of being deported. With imperial agents on his trail, he managed to get across the border to Haparanda in Sweden, and then to make his way south to Stockholm. There, at the beginning of the summer, he was joined by his family, and with financial aid provided by the resistance movement, they crossed the Atlantic (ibid.).

Kosonen had been on the new continent less than two months when the first issue of the Amerikan Suomalainen Työmies was published. It promoted a social democratic program based on the “unwavering principles of the international working-class movement”2 (Toimitus 1903), an ideological line Kosonen consistently supported (e.g., Kosonen 1903b; 1903c). Elis Sulkanen, a historian of the Finnish American labor movement, depicts Kosonen as a champion of this internationally

---

2 All translations from Finnish were provided by Mikko Pollari.
inclined “purely social democratic line” against a more ideologically mixed faction consisting of “nationalist-theosophists” and followers of Matti Kurikka, among others (Sulkanan 1951, 78; see also T. H. 1913, 9–12; Syrjälä 1913, 63–66). Disagreements between these trends led Kosonen to resign from his editorship at the end of September, but before the year was through, he had already been re-appointed to his post. Kosonen’s role was to be the martyr-hero in this quarrel, one of the first over the definition of the ideological direction of the Finnish American labor movement (see Pollari 2012).

Kosonen also advocated cooperation with other American socialists (e.g., Puotinen 1979, 189; Syrjälä [192?], 57). He took part as a delegate in the meeting of the workers’ associations in Cleveland in October 1904, where it was decided that the Finnish workers’ associations should join the Socialist Party of America. The decision has been seen as a significant step towards a unified program for the Finnish American workers’ movement. As Sulkanan argues, it “gave a common, practical and disciplined base for the ideologically quarreling associations” (Sulkanan 1951, 81–83; see also Syrjälä [192?], 59–61; Kero 1997, 82).

In his own recollection of the time, however, Kosonen does not present himself as an advocate of international socialism. Instead, he emphasizes the work he did for the Finnish national cause in both his editorial work and his lecture tours across North America. He recounts how sometimes his audiences were actually more internationally minded than he himself was, even refusing to sing “Maamme” (the Finnish national anthem) when requested to do so by Kosonen. He also took part in a failed undertaking to collect funds for action against the Russian regime, and assisted the newspaper Amerikan Kaiku (The echo of America), established by one of the leading men of the Finnish resistance, Eero Erkko (Kosonen 1931).

The nationalist emphasis in Kosonen’s memoir can be seen as a consequence of both hindsight and the original purpose of its production: the memoir was written to be used as material for Taistelujen kirja (Book of battles, 1936–41), Eino I. Parmanen’s monumental depiction of the Finnish national struggle against the oppressive measures of the Russian regime. However, Kosonen could also be quite the Finnish nationalist on the pages of Amerikan Suomalainen Työmies. For example, in an editorial most likely written by him soon after his reinstatement, the words chosen were not exactly those of an international class warrior:

Citizens, let us remember that the happiness of mankind in its entirety calls us to battle—for our human rights everywhere. Even though we are
dismembered all over America, let us still always be the unified nation, which has the courage and ability to fight oppression and injustice in all its forms.³

Interestingly, in this passage, nationalistic unity and the international fight against inequity coexist naturally with each other. All in all, the text is an interesting mix of national and class features. On one hand, it places workers against capitalists; on the other, nationality identity seems to override class divisions (ibid.).

The nationalistic sentiment expressed by Kosonen is fascinating in its contrast with the internationalism inherent in socialism. However, a combination of devotion to the workers’ cause and a strong nationalistic sentiment were, in fact, not uncommon in the early Finnish labor movement, the politics of which during the years 1905 to 1917 have been described as “class policy within the nation” (Heikkilä 1993). The tension between these two aspirations becomes evident in the next phase of Kosonen’s life, when he becomes entangled in the liaisons between Finnish social democrats and revolutionaries of the Russian Empire—liaisons that will have murderous consequences.

A SUPPORTER OF A RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

In those times Finland experienced a flood of political refugees from Russia, especially the Baltic provinces, where the punishment brigades left a bloody trail behind them. Activists and workers in particular tried their best to assist the refugees by providing lodging and other kinds of help. A great batch of these unfortunates, among them women and children, arrived also in Tampere. The leader organizing their aid in Tampere was the financial manager of Kansan Lehti, Vihtori Kosonen.⁴

The course of events, the assassination of the hated Governor General Bobrikov in particular, opened the way for Kosonen’s return home, and by the spring of 1905,

3  “Muistakaa siis kansalaisemme, että koko ihmiskunnan onni vaatii meitä taisteluun—ihmisoikeuksiemme edestä kaikkialla. Vaikka me olemme silvotut ympäri Amerikkaa, olkaamme silti aina yksi ja sama kansa, joka rohkenee ja voi taistella kaikkea sortoa ja vääryyttä vastaan.” (Kosonen 1903d)

4  “Niihin aikoihin tulvi Suomeen paljon valtiollisia pakolaisia Venäjältä, varsinkin Itämerenmaakunnista, jossa taantumuksen rankaisuretkikunnat tekivät veristä jälkeä. Etenkin aktivistit ja työväki pyrkivät parhaansa mukaan avustamaan pakolaisia, hankkimalla asuntoja y. m. apua. Tampereellekin saapui suuri joukko näitä onnettomia, joukossa naisia ja lapsiakin.
he was back in Finland (Kosonen 1931). He arrived just before the political situation in the Russian Empire took a major turn. At the end of October, a general strike—dubbed the Great Strike of 1905—was begun, and during the strike Kosonen wrote his name into Finnish history books by being one of the signatories of the famous Red Declaration of Tampere. The declaration crystallized the goals of the strike for the working class, its most revolutionary demand being a new temporary government in Helsinki, elected by universal suffrage (Tikka 2009, 164; on the revolutionary nature of the Red Declaration, see also Pollari et al. 2008, 43–53).

At the beginning of 1906, Kosonen worked as the financial manager of the Tampere-based Kansan Lehti (The people’s newspaper), the second-biggest working-class paper in Finland. At the time, Tampere was an important refuge for Russian socialists and revolutionaries. Its attractiveness was associated with its location. An inland town almost 200 kilometers from the capital, Helsinki, Tampere was tucked a safe distance from the main base of the Russian military in Finland. In addition, the local chief of police appointed after the General Strike, Matti von Nandelstadh, was a well-known activist in the fight against Russian political oppression, and was in the habit of turning a blind eye when it came to revolutionary activity in Tampere. His laissez-faire regime made possible the first—and, later, historical—meeting between Lenin and Stalin in December 1905, and conferences of Russian revolutionaries were also held in November 1906 and February 1907. When von Nandelstadh was finally expelled from his duties in March 1907—partly for allowing the last of these meetings to take place—Tampere ceased to be a safe haven for revolutionaries (Korpimaa 1934, 107–9; Soikkanen 1975, 92; Jutikkala 1979, 301–2).

Despite the rhetoric of international class struggle, the objectives and codes of conduct articulated by the party leadership of the Finnish social democrats were first and foremost national. Even though the leadership decided, following the Great Strike, to collaborate with Russian social democrats, the Finnish social democrats simultaneously wished to emphasize the independence of the Finnish workers’ movement from its Russian counterpart. Any form of cooperation that would risk the special status of the Grand Duchy within the Empire or the upcoming parliamentary reform promised as a result of the Great Strike was rejected (Soikkanen 1975, 91; Jussila 1979, 112–16; Kujala 1989, 157–68; Heikkilä 1993).

In 1906 the Social Democratic Party did, however, assist political refugees

Pakolaishuollon päällikkönä Tampereella oli Kansan Lehden taloudenhoitaja Vihtori Kosonen.” (Korpimaa 1934, 92)
arriving in Finland from Russia and the Baltic states (Kujala 1989, 264), and Tampere was bustling with those refugees. According to Kosonen, 114 refugees were accommodated in and around Tampere, funds were gathered to send them onwards to Sweden, and the refugees were also provided with firearms and explosives (1931). One of the notable organizers was Kosonen. This activity involved him in events that he could not control.

On Monday, February 26, 1906, the bureau of the Russian state bank in Helsinki was robbed by a gang of Russian-speaking men, who took with them a haul of 170,000 rubles. The same evening, two men and a woman arrived at the house of the workers’ association in Tampere, seeking shelter. Kosonen was called to intercept these new arrivals who, even though a connection to the robbery was suspected at first, were given refuge.

On Thursday, one of the men, by the name of Jan Tshokke, was arrested at the train station before he could board a train to Helsinki. The arrest was made on account of a denunciation made by a maid in the refugees’ boarding house. Even though the suspect was frisked, he still managed to conceal two guns and a knife in his clothes. When he was taken to the police station, all hell broke loose. Heavily armed, he stabbed one officer to death and wounded another. The rest of the policemen were forced to flee their station. For hours, Tshokke kept control of the situation by shooting from the windows of the police station, killing one more police officer and wounding yet another.

Kosonen was pulled further into the event when Tshokke addressed the crowd gathered outside and requested to meet him. Kosonen arrived on the scene, entered the building, and explained to the perpetrator that Finnish social democrats would not accept individual terrorist action and urged him to surrender. Kosonen’s advice was of no use, and Tshokke was eventually subdued, but only after the police station was attacked with water shot from fire hoses. During his arrest, Tshokke still managed to fight and even harm the police officers storming the station. In total, eight people were killed or wounded in the incident. (The events are recounted here following Korpimaa 1934, 92–94. See also Jutikkala 1979, 302–3 and Soikkanen 1975, 92.)

The dramatic affair had a profound effect on the political career of Kosonen. After the incident, he was criticized by Työmies, which saw Kosonen as having acted

---

as a “subsection of the secret police” during the drama (“Iltakatsaus” 1906). Kosonen was also reproached by workers in Tampere for handing over to the police a package containing part of the loot—which the robbers had left at the office of Kansan Lehti. Some were of the opinion that the impressive sum of money should have been used to benefit the working-class movement (Korpimaa 1934, 96–97).

The loss of love between Kosonen and the labor movement was mutual. According to his own recollection, he was deeply dissatisfied with the tolerant and even nonchalant stance the upper echelon of the movement took to the Tshokke incident, declaring it and other similar misdeeds mere “consequences of the capitalist system” (Kosonen 1931).

During 1906, Kosonen repeatedly came into conflict with the revolutionary romanticism within the party. At the turn of August, he had his hands full trying to stop the revolutionary enthusiasts in Tampere from rushing to join the famous Sveaborg rebellion, a mutiny at the military base of Sveaborg in Helsinki. Kosonen
believed that participating in the uprising would have been perilous for the whole country and that his obstruction of the cause was “the single most important deed I have done for my country” (Kosonen 1931). Even the hasty failure of the rebellion did not bring down the underground revolutionary spirit. During a party congress in Oulu, only a few weeks after the events at Sveaborg, Kosonen found out that an underground revolutionary organization was about to be established in Tampere (Kosonen 1931; Soikkanen 1975, 108; Korpimaa 1934, 70–71).

These manifestations of “anarchism” made Kosonen grow more and more distant from the working-class movement. Gradually he resigned from one influential post after another. During the year of 1906, he gave up his position as a member of the party administration (Kosonen 1931) and his membership in the workers’ association of Tampere (Soikkanen 1975, 108), resigned from his duties at Kansan Lehti (Ala-Kapee 1972, 283), and, finally, refused to present himself as a candidate for the Social Democratic Party in the upcoming parliamentary elections of 1907 (Soikkanen 1975, 108; Heikkilä 1993, 60).

After leaving Kansan Lehti, Kosonen started a new newspaper venture with three other moderate social democrats: Kössi Kaatra, whose literary activities Kati Launis highlights in her article in this volume; Yrjö Mäkelin; and Reino Drockila. The paper, Oikeus (Justice), was fueled by a critical stance toward violent class struggle and the assumption of its acceptance by the leaders of the movement. Oikeus was, however, shortly discontinued. According to Kosonen, the reason was a public announcement by the Social Democratic Party that defended a parliamentary course of action and denounced all other options for class struggle (Kosonen 1931; cf., e.g., Soikkanen 1975, 109). Later Kosonen believed that the declaration was only window dressing meant to hide the careless, illegal activism that continued unabated (Kosonen 1931).

The tumultuous year of 1906 was clearly a turning point in Kosonen’s relationship with the working-class movement. Kosonen sidelined himself from the movement, which he saw as slipping in the direction of nationally dangerous politics. Presumably, the unfortunate Tshokke affair, for which Kosonen was personally partly responsible, had a particular effect. It is not far-fetched to assume that it added weight to the scale against illegal revolutionary action and also made him suspicious concerning collaboration with foreign revolutionaries. When recollecting the dramatic events of 1906, Kosonen expressed these feelings in a very traditional

way: “In general, we aided the Russian revolutionaries, but still there was always the doubt that a Russki is a Russki, even if you fry him in butter” (Kosonen 1931).

**Publisher Kosonen: A Mediator of International Influences**

In bourgeois circles it was rumored that the money Tshokke left at the offices of *Kansan Lehti* did not find its way back to its rightful owners. Kosonen was mentioned as one of three working-class men who were assumed to have embezzled the money, divided it, and built a future career with their respective parts of the loot. Kosonen was said to have used his share to establish a printing press and a publishing house, while it was claimed that Kössi Kaatra used his to found a bookshop in Tampere (Korpimaa 1934, 97).

And indeed, after the end of *Oikeus*, the phase of Kosonen’s career that he is best known for began. From 1907 until 1910, he ran a publishing company under his own name, releasing seventy-seven titles, including fiction, poetry, and plays as well as theoretical works on socialism and education, among other topics.8

Kosonen had had ambitions to become a publisher even before his sudden migration to the United States. As early as 1902, he planned to publish works by the leading man of Finnish theosophy, Pekka Ervast; “the Tolstoy of Finland,” Arvid Järnefelt;9 and apparently the American economist Henry George as well (Häkli 1955, 360). And indeed, in 1902, Leo Tolstoy’s *Evankeliumi* (The gospel) was published by Kosonen. For some reason, nothing more came of this promising start, and Kosonen was swept away by the flow of events described above.

At the end of 1906, the time was finally, and a bit paradoxically, right for Kosonen. It might be said that his estrangement from the labor movement opened the door for him to pursue his old ambition. After *Oikeus* had been discontinued, Kosonen was without a job, and because he had worked for a dissident paper, his career prospects in working-class journalism probably were not the brightest. It is also questionable whether he had any will to work for the labor press any more.

---

7 A literal translation of the Finnish saying: “Ryssä on ryssä vaikka voissa paistaisi.”
8 The information concerning Kosonen’s publications has been gathered from Melinda, the catalogue of Finnish university libraries, and Fennica, the Finnish national bibliography. For more information on Kosonen’s publications, see Pollari (forthcoming).
9 Arvid Järnefelt (1861–1932) was a well-off son of a noble family, a writer, and a soon-to-be lawyer, who experienced a conversion to Tolstoyism and published a much-debated confessional book about it (*Heräämiseni* [My awakening]) in 1894. The prolific Järnefelt became the best-known proponent of Tolstoyism in Finland through his own works and his translations of Tolstoy’s texts. (On the life of Järnefelt, see Häkli 1955, Niemi 2005, and Karkama 2010; on Tolstoyism in Finland, see Nokkala 1958, and Wahlroos and Turtiainen, eds., 2010.)
In addition, the abolition of pre-censorship after the General Strike created a new, more relaxed situation for publishers (see, e.g., Leino-Kaukiainen 1990, 63), and a few years of steep rise in the amount of literature and printed publications in general was experienced (Häggman 2008, 287–88).

The start of the literary activity of Kosonen’s company was, therefore, part of a larger trend. The most active years of his company were years of high hopes and enthusiasm for the working class, and it was this enthusiasm that lay more broadly behind a wealth of new working-class literature (Roininen 1995, 202). Like many other publishers who began in the first years of the century, Kosonen had goals that were more ideological and moral than commercial (Häkli 1955, 360; Helleman 2007, 345–46). A closer look at his publications is needed to understand his company’s range and to evaluate its position in the field of working-class literature.

Kosonen’s output between 1907 and 1910 is characterized by both geographical and ideological diversity. Roughly half of his publications were translations of foreign literature. Kosonen published translations of works originating from Sweden, Russia, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Austria, Norway, Great Britain, and the United States. Of these, German and Russian works occupy the two top positions. Examples include translations from the following authors: Henry George (see below), Charles Edward Russel (Joukkojen nousu [The Uprising of the Many, 1909, orig. 1907]), and Jack London (Ennen Aatamia [Before Adam, 1908, orig. 1907]).

Kosonen did publish works by socialist authors, such as Perheen, yksityisomaisuuden ja valtion alkuperää, by Friedrich Engels (The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, 1907, orig. 1884), Kristinuskon alkuperää, by Karl Kautsky (Foundations of Christianity, 1909, orig. 1908), Sosialistinen yhteiskuntajärjestelmä (The Socialist Society, 1907), by Émile Vandervelde, and Kolme avointa kirjettä eräälle piispalle sosialismista (Three Open Letters to the Bishop of Manchester on Socialism, 1908, orig. 1894), by Robert Blatchford. All in all, however, works on socialism do not occupy a central role among Kosonen’s publications. Also, the socialist literature Kosonen did publish does not represent any single clear line of socialist thought, such as, for example, the Kautskyan interpretation, which had attained a dominant

---

10 An exact figure is a matter of interpretation, as it is unclear whether a few of the works should be considered as translations or adaptations.

11 The exact order of German and Russian works depends on how one is to classify Kosonen’s publications of the works of Karl Kautsky and Friedrich Engels mentioned below. If they are counted as German works, then Russian works occupy second place; otherwise, there is an equal number of Russian and German texts.
It is also noteworthy that few of the leading Finnish socialists wrote for Kosonen’s company.\textsuperscript{12} Of Finnish authors related to the labor movement, Kosonen published works mainly by such writers as A. B. Mäkelä, who represents the older guard of socialists, or A. B. Sarlin, who had already been estranged from the movement. An exception was Yrjö Sirola, the journalist and all-round party notable, whose collection of writings Kosonen published in 1908. Instead of Kosonen, the top social democrats were engaged with Työväen Sanomalehti-Osakeyhtiö (The Workers’ Newspaper Company), which has been seen as the biggest (Soikkanen 1961, 330) and most important (Roininen 1995, 195) contemporary working-class publisher. From 1906 onwards, Edvard Valpas, Otto Wille Kuusinen, and Kullervo Manner, as well as Sirola, served for several years on its Literature Committee, choosing its publications (Roininen 1995, 204–205).

Unfortunately, the differences and similarities in geographical and ideological diversity and volume of publications between Kosonen’s company and the other working-class publishers of the time are hard to evaluate because a comprehensive study of working-class publishing in Finland has yet to be done. In terms of volume, however, it is surprising that Kosonen, with his almost eighty titles between 1907 and 1910, nearly equaled the output of Työväen Sanomalehti-Osakeyhtiö, which between 1906 and 1909 published around ninety works (Roininen 1995, 202).

Even without a detailed comparison with other publishers, it is safe to say that Kosonen’s publications departed from the mainstream of Finnish social democracy. In his repertoire, instead of socialist literature, an emphasis on the works of Arvid Järnefelt and Leo Tolstoy can be highlighted. The biggest seller in Kosonen’s list of publications was \textit{Maa kuuluu kaikille!} (The land belongs to everyone!). This pamphlet by Järnefelt was influenced by the ideas of Henry George—even its title seems to refer to George’s speech “The Land for the People” (1889)—and sold over 25,000 copies (on the pamphlet, see, e.g., Löytty 2007). It was a part of the series \textit{Arvid Järnefeltin julkaisuja} (The publications of Arvid Järnefelt), which included translations of the works of Leo Tolstoy and Henry George himself. The series was a steady seller and several pieces went on to a second edition. Of George’s work, translations of \textit{Köyhyys on rikos} (The Crime of Poverty, 1907, orig. 1885), “\textit{Elä varasta!”} (Thou

\textsuperscript{12} However, it should be noted that the literary activity of the leading Finnish socialists was focused on newspaper work. Between 1906 and 1910, for example, Otto Wille Kuusinen did not write a single book, and Edvard Valpas wrote only one.
Shalt not Steal, 1907, orig. 1887), “Lähestykoon sinun valtakuntasi” (Thy Kingdom Come, 1907, orig. 1889), and Sosialinen pulma (Social Problems, 1908, orig. 1883) were published.

The works of Järnefelt and the translations of Tolstoy are part of another visible feature of Kosonen’s company: publications that were critical toward traditional, established Christianity. Apparently, Kosonen became known as a publisher of atheistic literature (Larkio 1967, 166), but as the presence of Tolstoyan works shows, such a definition would not be entirely accurate. Rather, his policy could be described as representing a free and anti-authoritarian stance on religion, resentful of the dogmas, rituals, and secular power of the organized church. This same sentiment was also expressed in the periodical Vapaa Ajatus (Free thought), which Kosonen published and edited during the year 1910.

Instead of a certain ideological line, it is rather diversity, liberalism, and indifference toward class or party borders that defines the choices of Kosonen. A telling example of this is Eetu Kokko, a play by Martti Wuori, which Kosonen published in 1907. Wuori was a notorious governor of the Bobrikov regime, and represented the Old Finn camp of Finnish politics. In his play, a political feud between a factory owner and his workers leads to the murder of the former. However, on his deathbed, the factory owner forgives his workers. This leads to a change of mind in the protagonist, the murderer Eetu, who regrets his deed, renounces class struggle, and
instead embraces a life guided by brotherly love (Ojajärvi 2008, 215; endnote 61, page 437).

The publication of such a book can be interpreted as infidelity to the labor party and its still new and relatively unstable ideology. It is tempting to associate it with the stormy year of 1906 and the disappointments Kosonen experienced with the working-class movement. However, one can also see it as an expression of a consistent inclination on Kosonen’s part. The juxtaposition of brotherly love and forgiveness against socialist class struggle and the victory of the former in Eetu Kokko fit well with his gravitation toward Tolstoyan thought evident throughout the time-frame of this article.

However, it must be pointed out that the scope of Kosonen’s output was not entirely the result of a conscious strategy. In a letter to Järnefelt at the end of 1908, Kosonen laments the loose policy of his company during the previous year. He is slightly ashamed of the literature that had come out under his name: “the world has received dispensable works of no significance.” Kosonen promised that in the next year he would read everything himself before publishing anything (Kosonen 1908). This implies that, in addition to conscious ideological choices, Kosonen’s publishing policy may also have been affected by such things as the sheer availability of translations.

The most prolific year for Kosonen’s company was 1908 (forty-six titles); in 1909, he released markedly fewer books (fourteen). This decrease in publications foreshadowed the end of Kosonen’s company; in 1910, he was forced to close shop because of financial difficulties (Häkli 1955, 432). After that, Kosonen changed both location and vocation. In a letter to Järnefelt in 1912, he reports living in Pori, on the west coast of Finland, and working as an insurance official, removed from the political turmoils of the capital (Kosonen 1912).

Still, Kosonen did make a brief comeback as a publisher before the closing of the book on him as a member of the working-class movement. In 1915, he had become bored with the insurance business and decided to resign in order once again to pursue the career he felt was his calling, book publishing (Kosonen 1915). Nearing the end of 1915, he started managing Sunnuntai (Sunday), a theosophically inclined newspaper edited by the poet Eino Leino (Onerva 1979, 450–57), and in 1917, he published one more work of wide interest, Kirkkopuheet (Church speeches), by Arvid Järnefelt. Just before the outbreak of the civil war in 1918, he also established a new

13 Still, Kosonen apparently published a second edition of Iloisia juttuja (Joyful stories), by A. B. Mäkelä in 1911.
The Literally International Adventures of Vihtori Kosonen

working-class paper, *Työn valta* (The power of work), in which he—once again—propagated anti-revolutionary, parliamentary social democracy. After the publication of its sample issue, however, an armed delegation of the Red Guard came to see Kosonen and handed him a notice of expulsion from the Social Democratic Party. This meant the end of his association with the Finnish working-class movement (Kosonen 1931).

**VIHTORI KOSONEN—A WORKING-CLASS PUBLISHER?**

When reading Kosonen’s recollections written in 1931, one does not get the impression of a veteran of the working-class movement, a man of total commitment to the workers’ cause. Rather, one has the impression of a man reminiscing about a phase of his life.

And, truly, Kosonen’s engagement with the Finnish labor movement was quite brief. By the end of 1906, his status as a social democrat was already debatable. During that year, he resigned from all his influential posts within the movement, and even though he was still a member of the Social Democratic Party, it is an open question as to how much of a socialist Kosonen deemed himself to be. In the eyes of the more recent members of the movement, Kosonen was probably already a lost soldier. The publication policy of his company can be seen to reflect this alienation from the mainstream of the working-class movement.

Although Kosonen may not be defined as a working-class publisher in the strictest sense—at least if one follows the criteria set by Raoul Palmgren, discussed in the articles of Elsi Hyytinen, Milla Peltonen, and Veli-Matti Pynttäri in this volume—his publications were still widely read among workers (see Mäkelä 1910; Palmgren 1966, 52; Kivistö and Riikonen 2007, 350). Therefore, he should be considered an important mediator of international influences to Finnish working-class literature and its readership. These influences were spread not only directly, by translations of foreign works, but also indirectly, through the works of domestic writers such as Järnefelt who themselves had absorbed foreign ideas.

Behind Kosonen’s dissemination of international works and ideas were the international influences to which he himself was exposed. He serves as an illuminating example of the richness of international influences in the Finnish working-class movement in the first years of the twentieth century. Instead of international, these influences may also be defined as transnational to emphasize the fact that the

---

14 For further discussion on Kosonen’s status as a working-class publisher, see Pollari (forthcoming).
interchange of ideas did not happen between nation-states, but between non-state actors, such as individuals and non-government organizations (see, e.g., Vertovec 2009, 3; Epple 2012, 162).

Interaction with the foreign revolutionaries of the Russian regime seems to have had an especially strong influence on Kosonen. The importance of his years in the United States in this sense is harder to evaluate, or is not as evident. On the other hand, it might also be said that the events of 1906 only strengthened convictions that already occupied a major place in Kosonen’s worldview. In fact, instead of socialism, a more predominant factor in his thinking seems to have been his fascination with Tolstoy and Järnefelt. Another resilient conviction is his strong nationalistic sentiment.

The single most important aspect of Kosonen’s activity might be that he made works by Tolstoy and Järnefelt easily available to a working-class readership. Aimo Roininen has noted (although his research focuses on fiction) that the conception of literature among the working-class movement was heavily influenced by Tolstoyism and its Järnefeltian variant (Roininen 1993, 401). Kosonen was central in mediating this influence, even though he was not the only working-class publisher of Tolstoyan works.

As Roininen emphasizes, a major achievement of working-class publishing was that it acquainted its readership with world literature (Roininen 1993, 407). Working-class publishing taught and accustomed workers to be readers of literature and users of literary institutions, such as bookshops and libraries, and thus took part in creating a new audience for Finnish and translated literature and even augmented the intellectual and cultural readiness of Finnish society (Roininen 1995, 214–15). In this achievement, Kosonen played a notable role. As a whole, the geographical and ideological diversity of Kosonen’s publication policy enriched the field of working-class literature and, more generally, Finnish literature as well.

**REFERENCES**


——— [-n, pseud.]. 1903d. Voimat koolle!” [Gather forces!]. *Amerikan Suomalainen Työmies* November 25, 1.


Parmanen, Eino I. 1936–41. Taistelujen kirja: Kuvauksia itsenäisyystaistelumme vaiheista sortovuosina I–IV [Book of battles: Depictions of the phases of our struggle for independence during the years of oppression]. Porvoo: WSOY.


“Sanomalehdet” [Newspapers]. 1903. Päivälehti February 6, 2.

Soikkanen, Hannu. 1961. Sosialismin tulo Suomeen ensimmäisiiin yksikamarisen eduskunnan vaaleihin asti [The arrival of socialism into Finland until the first parliamentary
The Literally International Adventures of Vihtori Kosonen

elections]. Porvoo: WSOY.


Women in Early Capitalism and Other Irrelevant Issues: Elvira Willman’s Struggle for Working-Class Authorship

Elsi Hyttinen
University of Turku

Abstract
The article discusses the early Finnish working-class writer Elvira Willman (1875–1925). Through a reading of a recently found manuscript of the 1916 play “Rakkauden orjuus” [The slavery of love], the article demonstrates how in Willman’s writing “the woman question” was one of the central themes in texts aimed at the working-class cultural field. Theoretically, the article promotes a view according to which an author does not become a working-class author by being born into a certain social class or living within it, but by signaling in various ways in her writing a desire to be interpreted as an author of working-class literature and by garnering affirmation from the gatekeepers of that field.

Introduction
There it is, just a few pages into the manuscript, Act One, Scene Two—a dialogue that brings us straight to one of the hallmark themes in the oeuvre of Elvira Willman (1875–1925): the questioning of the category of the individual. Here, as elsewhere, Willman does not seek to dispose of the category, quite the contrary: individuals are what her characters desperately, passionately want to be. Instead, Willman’s project is to show how profundely access to the position of an individual is restricted in terms of class and gender, even though some claim that individuality is a universal characteristic of human existence per se.

Mathilda

Indeed! Some say that an individual’s rights are also of importance. –
Julia

An individual is worth nothing.

Mathilda

Men always speak of the significance of individuality, how it distinguishes human beings from animals.

Julia

For us, my child, individuality is no asset.

Mathilda

Then perhaps we are no different from animals. We are half-human, just as Marja says.¹

Midwinter, a frozen sun peeks feebly through the window. Wrapped in a woolen scarf, I am sitting at the archives of the Theater Museum in Helsinki, turning the beautiful, handwritten pages of the director’s copy of “Rakkauden orjuus”² (The slavery of love). It is a play written in 1916, the manuscript of which was hitherto believed to have been lost. I read with eager curiosity, as one does when facing something new, yet familiar and recognizable.

It has been nearly a year since I defended my PhD thesis on Elvira Willman, a turn-of-the-century woman author, and the birth of the category of the “working-class writer” in Finland, but I have never read this play before. In fact, I have only known of the manuscript’s existence for some weeks. It was discovered by theater scholar Mikko-Olavi Seppälä among the papers of Hilma Rantanen, whose

¹ Mathilda
Niin! Muutamat puhuvat, että yksilön oikeus on myös tärkeä. –
Julia
Ei yksilö mitään merkitse.
Mathilda
Miehet puhuvat aina yksilöllisyyden suuruisesta, joka eroittaa ihmiset eläimistä.
Julia
Meille ei yksilöllisyyssä ole edullista lapsi.
Mathilda
Ehkk’emme eroakkaan eläimistä. Olemme puoli-ihmisä, niinkuin Marja sanoo. (Willman 1916; all translations from Finnish were provided by Elsi Hyttinen.)

² Names of manuscripts that have not been published as books will be given in citation marks whereas those of published work are given in italics. Elsewhere I have argued that plays could actually be considered as having been published if they have been performed onstage. However, in this article, I will adhere to the traditional way of making the distinction and signaling it by using either citation marks or italics.
theater group Uusi teatteri [The new theater] produced the play. Seppälä generously tipped me off before publishing his own article on the play in the historic, final issue of the Finnish cultural magazine Hiidenkivi (Seppälä 2012).

Elvira Willman was a playwright and contributor to several working-class newspapers and journals. She is also one of the marginal, almost forgotten figures of Finnish literary history. Admittedly, she is mentioned in most of the general depictions of Finnish literary and theater history of the twentieth century, but only in passing (Leino 1909, 316; Aspelin-Haapylä 1910, 143, 186, 209–10, 212, 244–45; Söderhjelm 1920, 288–94; Kallio 1929, 26; Koskimies 1953, 74, 92; Sarajas 1965, 13, 37; Laitinen 1991, 279–80, 282–83). A more detailed analysis is provided in newer work that benefits from a renewed interest in class questions as well as in women’s writing, a trend evident in Finnish academia since the late 1980s (Niemi and Nieminen 1988; Vapaavuori 1989; Roininen 1993, 1999; Järvinen 2006; Seppälä 2007, 70, 85, 89, 120, 138–39, 205, 303). The best sources for personal data on Willman, however, date from the 1960s: Raoul Palmgren’s history of early Finnish working-class literature (1966) and Marit Vallinharju-Suomela’s unpublished master’s thesis (1962) and her essay in a volume dedicated to the personal histories of Finnish Red activists (Vallinharju 1967, 363–84). My thesis (Hyttinen 2012) benefits from all the works mentioned above and remains the only monograph written on Willman.

Willman’s first play, Lyyli, premiered in 1903 at the Finnish National Theater, where it garnered much publicity and praise—the play even won its author a state award (Niemi 1905). Quite soon, however, Willman lost contact with the national theater scene and started working with smaller theaters, mostly amateur working-class groups. After the Finnish Civil War of 1918, Willman fled from Finland to Soviet Russia, where she was executed in 1925 (Paastela 2003, 120, 183–84; Vallinharju 1967, 380–81; Lahti-Argutina 2001, 571; Hyttinen 2012, 155–56).

Willman was one of the most prominent writers and cultural figures to have made a career in the field of working-class culture in pre-independence Finland. However, she herself was not from a working-class background. Willman came from a family of ship owners and merchants, even though her parents were relatively poor and apparently had no part in the family business. She received the best education a woman of her time could have in Finland: a high-school examination at a mixed-gender institution and studies in the humanities at the University of Helsinki (Vallinharju 1967, 367–70; Palmgren 1966, 213–15). In my thesis (2012), I examine how it was possible that, with this background, Willman became a working-class
writer. I do not look for one single explanatory factor, but attempt instead to analyze the entire span of her career, the choices she made, the risks she took, the alliances she built, as something of a continuum of actions that, both intentionally and unintentionally, distinguished her from the mainstream\(^3\) of Finnish literature and marked her as an agent of an alternative field, that of the emerging working-class literature.

Now, reading this play that feels both alien and familiar, my sentiments are ambivalent. Of course, I had always been aware that one can never give an exhaustive account of a writer, as reality itself is manifold and even in her own day Willman’s name had many meanings depending on the speaker. But that was a general principle I subscribed to, rising from my poststructuralist education and view of history. I do not think I really took into account the possibility of coming across new manuscripts after my monograph on Willman was complete. Yet here I am, with my hands clad in white cotton gloves. Now what?

**One is not Born a Working-Class Author**

In 1966 Raoul Palmgren, a Finnish scholarly authority on working-class culture, wrote of Elvira Willman that “her recurrent preoccupation with sexual morals kept her from writing of other, more relevant social themes.”\(^4\) I have always found this statement outrageous. First, because it suggests that Elvira Willman was an insignificant figure as regards any analysis of working-class literature and, second, because it suggests that, even though the abuse and subordination that women in early modern Finland experienced was indeed highly class specific, this was somehow irrelevant from the point of view of, well, more relevant class issues. The rationale behind Palmgren’s statement is, of course, that he knows what proper working-class literature is about. In fact he wrote, in 1965, a PhD thesis about the definition of the term. For him, working-class literature is literature written by the working class, expressive of the “working-class worldview”—rough, untamed in form, and even clumsy at

---

3. The uniformity of the mainstream is, of course, to a certain extent an illusion, an imaginary horizon perceptible only by a gaze that identifies with its outside—in this case, the working-class field. However, the mainstream is not solely a projection; it also had a very real existence in terms of national cultural politics, mainstream publications, newspapers aimed at the general public, etc. In Finnish, this field is often referred to as *porvarillinen julkisuus* (bourgeois public sphere) or *kansallinen julkisuus* (national field of culture) in the context of the turn of the century.

times (Palmgren 1965, 222–23).

I find this linking of writers’ backgrounds to their aesthetic choices dubious, to say the least, for, as Palmgren himself admits, most writers operating within the working-class cultural field in turn-of-the-century Finland were, in fact, not lower class by birth (Palmgren 1966, 178). To this I would add that, conversely, quite a number of mainstream writers were: the social stratum of the intelligentsia was narrow, and people were seldom born into it. The figure of the upstart was as common in literature as it was among writers (see Rojola 2009), as many people seeking a position within Finnish cultural life or academia actually had peasant roots or parents who made a living doing manual labor. This fact alone should warn us against trying to explain away too many aspects of an individual’s writing, their politics or aesthetics, through their background. Also, on a more serious note, this seemingly innocent linkage serves as a tool for Palmgren in his project of evaluating working-class writing as either relevant or irrelevant (Hyttinen 2012, 49). In skillfully employing the argument of an author’s background, he does not have to admit that he simply prefers certain themes and storylines to others, finding more authenticity and traces of true experience in his preferred texts—and, lo and behold, it is not simply his opinion that writing about sexual morals is irrelevant, that is just the way things are.

Palmgren is, of course, long dead, and as a scholar he was a child of a different era. So even though my initial impulse was to cry out loud, “What do you mean sexual morals are irrelevant?” I’ve let that be. Besides, arguing about the limits of what is “relevant” would leave the theoretical problematics underlying the question untouched. I needed something else, another starting point, and realized that there was one: history—however problematic a category that might be.

Regardless of whether Willman’s contemporaries or later generations found her writing relevant, it is indisputable that she was an agent in the working-class field of culture, as opposed to that of the mainstream (Hyttinen 2012, 10). When her first play premiered, the working-class cultural elite still favored the National Theater, claiming it was as much theirs as anybody else’s (Seppälä 2007, 120; Hyttinen 2012, 54–55). Later, by the time the National Theater came to be regarded as a bourgeois establishment, Willman was already working with working-class amateur actors. The only newspapers and journals to which she ever contributed were more or less socialist, and all of them were aimed at a working-class readership. I understood that I could start with this and leave open the definition of working-class literature. Instead, I could concentrate on what Willman wrote and how
she acted in the public sphere, and examine what led the world around her to call her a working-class writer (Hyttinen 2012, 9). I discovered many such factors. Some features of her writing—themes, tropes, storylines, and figures—could be interpreted as signaling a desire to distance herself from mainstream literature. Also, the media she wrote for, the media in which her work was discussed, and the theaters that had her work in their repertoire, all associated her primarily with a working-class audience.

Working this way, the meaning of the concept of a working-class writer is both left open and rendered historically specific. An act that I might interpret as an attempt to pass oneself off as a working-class writer would in another circumstance not perhaps count as such an act. A writer’s acts are only understandable with regard to their historical context.

Pierre Bourdieu’s view of literature, as a field in which a constant battle is being fought over what is of value and what is not (Bourdieu 1985, 105; 1996; Mäkinen 2001, 27; Hyttinen 2012, 25), offered me a way of conceptualizing what I meant by a “working-class writer.” I meant somebody who succeeded in gaining access to the field of working-class literature and approval from the gatekeepers of that field (Hyttinen 2012, 11). As Bourdieu claims, the fields are historically specific. The field in which Willman operated was a very particular one, and one unprecedented in Finnish history.

Until the early twentieth century, as research shows, the public sphere in Finland had been relatively uniform (cf. Haapala 1999, 214–16; Lahtinen 2006, 150–54; Nieminen 2006, 160). It was controlled by a small number of people, through a small number of institutions, and connected to nationalist ideologies. It was only around the turn of the century that the public sphere quickly began to splinter, co-evally with industrialization and the modernization of society. One outcome of that process was the birth of the working-class cultural field (Roininen 1993, 1). This field was not defined solely by the cultural artifacts produced and distributed within it; it was also characterized by a high level of institutional autonomy (Roininen 1993, 5), complete with its own newspapers, theaters, and publishers, as well as clubs, societies, and connections to party organs.

As I see it, therefore, Willman was a working-class writer because she had access to this particular field. And, relevant from a later perspective or not, whilst part of that field, she wrote a great deal about sex.
Newspapers and the Power of Definition

Back at the archives, I find myself reading about Marja, a middle-class young woman in pre-independence Finland, who wants to pass as an individual and do what an individual could do (according to the wildest ideologies of her times), such as love freely without the need to tie oneself to a supporter through marriage. However, towards the end of the play, she must agree to marry her suitor, with whom she already has a child. This is not a romantic, happy ending but a grim and distressing one. Marja wanted to be independent, but there is no room in society for a woman with a baby to be that—and no jobs either. One of the final straws pushing Marja towards marriage is when she meets a working-class woman who does not have even the same assets as Marja does, and whose baby has just died in the care of somebody else while the mother was trying to find work to support herself and the child.

The text is witty, at times angry, and, at least from a feminist perspective, highly political. In Willman’s career, it represents an interesting turning point. “Rakkauden orjuus” was preceded by six years of silence, a phase of public inaction that divides Willman’s career in two. Her first plays were in obvious dialogue with the strong Finnish tradition of realism and sought to describe social problems not solely at the level of the individual but at that of a class, whereas the plays following “Rakkauden orjuus” tend towards revolutionary romanticism. “Rakkauden orjuus” can be located somewhere in the middle ground between these two extremes. Stylistically, it follows the mold of the early plays, but thematically it paves the way for the final plays with their upper-class female protagonists.

Perhaps because Willman offered no public explanation for her whereabouts during that period of silence—or the reason for that silence—newspapers at both ends of the liberal continuum devoted a significant amount of space to the attempt to contextualize the play with regard to Willman’s personal history. Though I did not have access to the manuscript when writing my thesis, the publicity surrounding Willman’s comeback offered an interesting case for study.

Reading what newspapers wrote about “Rakkauden orjuus” and its author, one is constantly reminded of how explicitly a writer—by this, I mean a writer as a public figure, a location at the crossroads of various discourses and institutional practices, a position through which an individual can act, but with which it is impossible to become entirely identical—is the product of the on-going negotiation between different agents within the literary field, each of them trying their best to imbue the figure of the writer with meanings favorable to their own agenda.
In reviewing the play, both *Helsingin Sanomat*, the newspaper of the Young Finns—a liberal bourgeois political movement characterized in particular by its critical stance regarding the Russian political presence in Finland and by its popularity among artists and the intelligentsia—and *Työmies*, the biggest working-class daily newspaper of the era, wrote at length about Elvira Willman, *the person*. Interestingly, both newspapers claimed that Willman disappeared from public sight soon after her first play in 1903; apart from her debut play, the only other work mentioned is *Kellarikerroksessa* (*Below street level, 1907*), her only play (in addition to the debut) published as a book. This means that both newspapers almost entirely ignored Willman’s diligent contribution to working-class publications, as well as a good part of her dramatic output: her second play “Rhodon valtias” (*The emperor of Rhode, 1904, manuscript not preserved*), produced by the National Theater in 1904, which failed and was shut down after only a few nights, and the play “Juopa” (*The cleft*), premiered by working-class amateurs toward the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, in 1909 (*Willman 1909a [2007]*).

In both a feature item in *Helsingin Sanomat*, published prior to the premiere of “Rakkauden orjuus” (*E. K-vi 1916a*), and a review in *Työmies*, published immediately after the opening night (*Valpas 1916*), the reader is provided with versions of Willman’s life-story that are both ample and biased. By choosing what to reveal and what to omit, the two newspapers locate Willman very differently from each other vis-à-vis the competing fields of literature and the working-class movement. *Helsingin Sanomat* pays a relatively large amount of attention to Willman’s play. Not only does “Rakkauden orjuus” receive a long and detailed review, but also a short anticipatory story encourages readers to take interest in the play and its writer:

As readers will remember, Elvira Willman garnered notable success with her first play Lyyli a decade and a half ago. Since then, the only work she has published is the play “Below Street Level,” a rather vulgar, realistic depiction of the lower classes. Circumstances then forced her to suspend her writing career for a long time. With the fine success of Lyyli at the National Theater in mind, we look forward to tonight’s premiere with some curiosity.°

In this feature, as sympathetic and enthusiastic as it is, Willman’s oeuvre is ignored almost in its entirety. The works she published through working-class cultural

° “Kuten muistetanee, saavutti Elvira Willman puolitoista vuosikymmentä takaperin huomattavan menestyksen esikoisteoksellaan Lyyli. Sen jälkeen ei häneltä julkisuuteen ole
institutions do not seem to exist at all. Either intentionally or unintentionally, the newspaper denies the very existence of a competing cultural field. It does not claim that the other field is less significant or that works published there are of a lesser quality: such a competing field simply does not exist.

The same process continues in the eventual review in *Helsingin Sanomat*, published a few days later. Here, not only is the existence of a working-class cultural field denied once again, but also Willman’s debt to the mainstream highlighted:

The success of *Lyyli* was supported by two factors: Kaarlo Bergbom and a good performance. The Slavery of Love does not enjoy these benefits.6

The first explanatory factor given here for the success of Willman’s debut play is the support she received from Kaarlo Bergbom. The founder of the Finnish National Theater, Kaarlo Bergbom was a mentor and an important first reader for many Finnish playwrights through the final decades of the nineteenth century. The most well-known and well-documented of these mentoring relationships was that with Minna Canth, to this day one of Finland’s most significant dramatists. This was no random act of kindness on Bergbom’s part: supporting and helping playwrights was one of the ways Bergbom helped implement his political aspirations of giving birth to a particularly Finnish theater and dramatic literature. These aspirations were strongly connected to the ideology of Finnish nationalism: the creation of a national culture and its institutions was seen as a central vehicle for the national revival. In Finnish political philosophy, strongly influenced by Hegel through the work of J. V. Snellman, making a nation aware of its own existence was an indispensable step in the dialectical process that would eventually lead to independence. Within this dialectical framework, a nation needed to be represented as a single entity, the different strata of which had compatible interests—as opposed to, say, class differences—when seen from the point of view of a larger historical continuum (Liikanen 1989, 136–40). Naturally, in a mentor–mentee relationship, these ideological aims were not always explicit or the central focus. Bergbom’s suggestions had more to do with creating suspense and developing characters, refining language or shaping plot twists, polishing the dénouements, and other such literary questions, and the
mentee did not always agree with these instructions or abide by them (cf. Maijala 2010, 82–83).

To mention Bergbom’s name in a review is to call attention to the national tradition of culture and Willman’s debt to this tradition and its agents. The mentor gets a mention, as does Willman’s desire to become a writer and to secure help in realizing this dream, whereas her background and her political commitments do not. The gatekeepers of working-class culture were eager to emphasize, whenever possible, the working-class writer’s first-hand experience of poverty and misery and the ways those writers gained a general knowledge of culture and the world outside the bourgeois schooling system. Even Willman, in some of her newspaper articles, propagated this kind of “authentic” authorship (cf. Willman 1909b), arguing for its superiority over writers benefiting from bourgeois culture. However, here Helsingin Sanomat reminds its readers that Willman was not an autodidact of the kind she herself favored (Hyttinen 2012, 119–20) but a member of the intellectual elite whom one of the founding fathers of national culture had helped in getting started.

Työmies gives a very different take on Willman’s comeback. This newspaper, too, acknowledges Willman’s education and her personal history as a member of the intelligentsia. However, this history is offered as proof of the authenticity of Willman’s critical attitude towards high society: she knows what she is talking about when she describes the upper classes, for she has lived among them. The idea of the authentic experience of misery, so valued in the working-class cultural field, is here turned in Willman’s favor, as the text points out that she has first-hand experience of how the oppressors think and act:

Elvira Willman spent her childhood in a small town, went to a bourgeois school, studied languages and literature at the university, and even tested her wings as an actor. Moving in such upper circles, she had the opportunity to become familiar with the bourgeois life and spirit. After embarking on a literary career, she dared to begin exposing certain unpleasant facts about those circles. She even managed to have these observations performed on stage at the conservative National Theater.

Here Willman’s writing is understood primarily as an “exposé” of unpleasant facts about the upper class, and not so much as creative work dependent on and benefiting

7 “Elviira Willman on kasvanut pikkukaupungissa, käynyt herraskoulua, opiskellut yliopistossa kielä ja kirjallisuutta, jopa rintelystä näyttelijätäären urallakin. Eri heräspiireissä seurustellessaan oli hänellä aikoinaan tilaisuuksia niiden henkeen ja elämään. Alettuaan kirjallisen

65
from knowledge of literature and its conventions. Whereas *Helsingin Sanomat* saw Bergbom as an essential variable in Willman’s early success, for *Työmies*, Willman is a lonely agent who succeeds in exposing unfavorable observations about the bourgeoisie on their own national stage. Here, the support she secured for her aspirations from the director of the National Theater is not mentioned at all. On the contrary, the paper makes a point of emphasizing how lonely a figure Willman was as a writer:

> Undoubtedly the higher cultural circles feared she might turn into a nuisance too dangerous for them. Apparently, rich publishing houses and big theaters did nothing to support her work. Literary work on any larger scale had to be abandoned, at least to some extent. 8

After this, the newspaper lists turning points in Willman’s personal history, emphasizing her lack of money and the misery of her circumstances: having children, becoming an (unsuccessful) professional gardener, taking her crops to market with a horse and carriage in the early hours, selling vegetables while dressed in rags. In this review, as in *Helsingin Sanomat*, the matter of what Willman has done in terms of cultural production during the thirteen years after her debut play is left vague:

> The authoress has, despite all material hardship, carried on examining life in different social circles, collecting subject material from the highest peaks of the bourgeoisie as well as the lowest sewers of society. She has certainly, while busy earning a meager living, completed a number of works and sketches that simply will not make their way into larger theaters or publishing programs. 9

The same omission of works published through the institutions of the working-class cultural field, which can be witnessed in *Helsingin Sanomat*, is evident here in *Työmies*—a key medium in that field. One can only guess as to the reasons for this.


9   “Kirjailijatar on kaikista aineellisista koettelemuksista huolimatta jatkanut eri yhteiskuntapiirien tutkiskeluua, kasannut aiheita porvariston korkeimmilta huipeilta ja myös yhteiskunnan syvimmistä lokaviemäreistä. Epäilemättä on hänellä valmiinakin koko joukko kaikellaisten touhujen ohella kyhättyjä teoksia ja luonnoksia, jotka kuitenkaan eivät pääse nykyisin isoihin teattereihin eivätkä kustannusluetteloihin.” (Valpas 1916)
It is most likely that the journalist writing for Työmies knew that after her 1903 debut Willman had only received publicity within the working-class media. Acting within the working-class field required only a modest amount of exchangeable cultural capital: competition was limited and the gatekeepers inexperienced, and the position, publicity, and monetary rewards available for writers in this field were of a significantly smaller scale than in the field of national culture. Instead of emphasizing the cultural production that had taken place under these lesser circumstances, the newspaper looks at the author from the perspective of the general public and makes the same observation as the mainstream daily: by the time of the premiere of “Rakkauden orjuus,” Willman had been almost invisible for years.

Helsingin Sanomat, the newspaper of the Young Finns, represents Willman first and foremost as a protégée of Kaarlo Bergbom, who, after the death of her mentor, never managed to repeat the success of her debut. Työmies pictures her as singlehandedly exposing the lies of the bourgeoisie. Both present her to the reading public on a relatively clean slate, paying little or no attention to the work published between her debut and her comeback. From this point onwards, Willman could have taken a whole new direction, enjoying the freedom to rename herself in the space opened up by this peculiar amnesia, but she chooses not to. With renewed determination she becomes politically engaged, writing revolutionary romantic plays and contributing to working-class newspapers. And this direction she stuck to, even through the Finnish Civil War of 1918, gaining a reputation as one of the main agitators for the Reds (see Hyttinen 2012, 144–45). In turn, the name and fame she gained during the months of battle made it impossible for her to remain in the country after the outcome of the war became clear. However, the short stories she published in various newspapers during the war achieved much in terms of solidifying her position among the ranks of early Finnish working-class writers (Hyttinen 2012, 153–55).

“Our Private Proprietors, Men”
Midwinter days are short, but it’s still light when I reach the final page. With its four acts, “Rakkauden orjuus” is not very long. In fact, for a play by Willman the text is surprisingly coherent and intensive, and as such it reminds me of Willman’s debut, Lyyli. Many of Willman’s other works are so filled with themes, characters, and plot twists that they almost disintegrate. As I close the book, I feel strangely moved, but by what, I am not entirely sure.
Is it Marja’s destiny, her wit and bravery that in the end will not help her in becoming what she wants to be? Or is it the thought of the writer, a woman about my own age, managing after years of silence to produce a new play for the world to see, but who—as the newspapers tell me—does not even attend the premiere? Or is it something more abstract, her handwriting that I’ve been following with my glove-clad fingers for the past few hours? (I’m sure it’s hers, not some assistant’s. I’ve seen the spelling mistakes before, the peculiar use of dashes, the clear and slightly childish cursive script.) Is it the trace of Elvira Willman, the human being who once existed, who held the pen, who sat in front of this notebook just as I am sitting now? Illusory presence. When I wrote my thesis, I spent long hours tracing it, but eventually the material I worked with became so familiar to me that it lost its magic. I thought I would never come to experience the peculiar feeling of Willman’s presence again, but here, suddenly, the traces feel fresh. It is as though I were being reminded of the irreducibility of the other’s otherness. I have written a sort of life and works story about her, but I cannot master her. She will not consent to align herself with my story.

But I still have a story, a story about Willman’s authorship, the twists and turns of her career, and I have now discovered a new layer to the story. This layer does not obliterate the original story (a matter that comes as something of a relief), but it does lend it fresh nuances.

Thematically, “Rakkauden orjuus” returns quite interestingly to the conflicts of Willman’s debut. In Lyyli, Willman described a working-class girl who pursues an education and wants to implement in her own life the individualism she has read about in books. In Lyyli, as in “Rakkauden orjuus,” a woman’s access to the position of an individual is tested through love and pregnancy. In Lyyli, the eponymous protagonist has a love affair with an upper-class man, a doctor. The man does not have the courage to treat her as his equal in the eyes of the world—regardless of the philosophers of individuality they both cite at length and claim to follow. After the woman becomes pregnant, the doctor offers to pay for the child’s upkeep and the woman’s silence, but the woman declares that she would rather raise the child on her own than take anything from the coward the man has proven himself to be. As the play finishes at this point, we do not learn what happens to Lyyli and the child; we can only imagine. In “Rakkauden orjuus,” the conflicts are the same, though this time we follow the destiny of the protagonist far longer—up until the moment of her giving in at the impossibility of simultaneously trying to pass as an individual and being a woman with a child. In this respect Willman seems to have lost some of her
idealism. She is now more aware of the structures governing an individual’s choices and less trusting in a person’s ability to choose her own destiny.

For Willman, the woman question and the working-class question were always closely linked. In this respect, she aligns herself with the working-women’s movement, though her particular way of combining the two and stressing the role of sexuality did not appeal to working-class women’s political leaders (Kilpi 1953, 112–13). One could not be resolved without the other, regardless of a woman’s class status. As early as 1906, she wrote in a newspaper aimed at the Red brigades:

> How shall women become independent? Through uniting with each other and joining the social-democrat movement, for the solution to the woman question depends to a great extent on a favorable resolution to the question of workers’ status. That said, we must always, as the proletariat of the proletariat, as the lowest of the low, remember to protect our interests with regards to our private proprietors, men.10

With the linking of the two battles in mind, one can understand how such disillusionment in the face of a woman’s possibility of freedom in present-day society links with the revolutionary romanticism of Willman’s last plays. Willman no longer has faith in slow reforms. The oppressed will remain oppressed unless radical changes occur. After “Rakkauden orjuus,” Willman wrote two plays, “Vallankumouksen vyöryssä” (In the turmoil of revolution, 1917) and “Veriuhrit” (Blood offerings, 1917), of which the first manuscript has been preserved in the archives of the Finnish Literature Society, and the latter, at least to date, is lost. In “Vallankumouksen vyöryssä,” Willman no longer tries to portray common people or daily life. She does not attempt to reveal the hidden classed and gendered agenda of her contemporaries in talking about individuality. She does not ask whether a woman like her, with her upper-class upbringing, can join the working-class movement. She demands blood: the play describes Helsinki high society after the first Russian revolution of February 1917, and lets the female upper-class protagonist become a revolutionary. Through the forces of idealism and commitment, she joins the working class in its struggle.

---

10 “Miten naiset saavuttavat riippumattoman aseman? Yksimielisyyden avulla, ja liittyen sosiaalidemokraattiseen liikkeeseen, sillä tulevan yhteiskuntajärjestelmän onnellisesta ratkaisusta työväenkyvyysmeni nähdä riippuu myös suureksi osaksi naiskysymyksen ratkaisu. Mutta sen ohella meidän on aina muistettava, että me ollen proletariaatin proletariaattia, köyhäläistön kurjalistoa, aina valvomme omia asioitamme yksityisomistajajamme, miehiä vastaan.” (Willman 1906, 14)
for freedom and independence. These are the same goals that Marja reaches for but cannot achieve in “Rakkauden orjuus.”

CONCLUSION

Elvira Willman embodies nearly all the radical tendencies of her era: her political views shift from liberalism to socialism to communism to individualism to anarchism and back again. In following her personal history, one can learn a lot about what it meant in practice to rebel against all establishments and all forms of power, even when such oppositional attitudes may end up with their proponent shooting herself in the foot. Her figure also reveals a serious and sad side: she never really found a like-minded group with which she could identify and feel safe. She seems to have been an antagonist with regard to everybody, even when her pen could be appropriated to promote a common cause. This trait in her story led to a violent end in Soviet Russia, where she first worked for the Finnish Communist party, then allegedly against it, until she was ultimately executed in a Russian prison in 1925 (Paastela 2003, 120, 183–84; Lahti-Argutina 2001, 571; Hyttinen 2012, 155–56).

After emigrating to Russia, Willman secured a job as a sort of general artistic writer for publications of the Finnish Communist Party (Jalava 1986). However, soon after this, she became involved in fights in which common people, who had fought for the Reds, accused their leaders of misappropriating both army and party funds while the people themselves lived in poverty. In 1920, this discontent culminated in an attack in which eight members of the Red elite where shot in a hallway outside the St. Petersburg flat where party leaders held their meetings. Willman and her husband were accused of being the masterminds behind the attacks and were both sentenced to death, though they had not taken part in the attack themselves. Willman was imprisoned and released several times before her sentence was finally carried out (Paastela 2003, 120–21, 166, 183–85, 242; Ylikangas 2004, 114).

It is not, however, only Elvira Willman’s life-story that makes her such an interesting figure. Willman is also remarkable in that she was one of the very first authors to have a career in the field of early Finnish working-class literature. She was also one of the very last, for since the Civil War Finland has never again seen a situation with two competing cultural fields, both characterized by institutional autonomy and a more or less overt connection to party politics. Later on, these fields merged with one another, forming a single field in which a constant battle over hegemony is still being fought. Through studying Willman one gets to witness how a field alternative to that of the official culture comes into being, how it unfolds with
each step taken on it. When Willman began her career, there were no rules that she could have followed in order to secure her place. Such rules were made up at the moment of their implementation. The creation of working-class literature took place in constant dialogue between the field’s gatekeepers and writers aspiring to access that field.

In Willman’s case, the dialogue was interrupted for years. It involves many conflicting voices and does not really have closure—unless one considers my thesis to be closure of a sort. To her contemporaries, Willman simply vanished out of sight. Even the exact year of her death was unknown until Soviet archives were opened up after the collapse of state communism. But even if there were no rules to follow, Elvira Willman’s choices do have a certain inner logic to them: whatever politics she was engaged in, in whichever literary negotiations she partook, she always wrote about women. And for her and her audience, it must have seemed somehow relevant.

References


Kilpi, Sylvi-Kyllikki. 1953. *Suomen työläisnaisliikken historia* [The history of the working-class women’s movement in Finland]. Helsinki: Kansankulttuuri.


the issue, no page numbers].


———. 1917. “Vallankumouksen vyöryssä” [In the turmoil of revolution]. Unpublished manuscript in the care of the Literary Archives of the Finnish Literature Society in Helsinki.

“Nor Happiness, nor Majesty, nor Fame”: Proletarian Decadence and International Influence in Early Twentieth-Century Finnish Working-Class Literature

Kirsti Salmi-Niklander
University of Helsinki

Abstract

This article focuses on the complex relationship of socialism, working-class culture, and fin de siècle decadence in early twentieth-century Finnish working-class culture. The hegemonic ideology of the labor movement praised self-discipline and conservative literary ideals, but many working-class people were inspired by the radical writings of August Strindberg and Oscar Wilde. Furthermore, proletarian decadence was related to the pro- and anti-feminist debates, the ideas of free love, and to the construction of a new working-class masculinity. These ideals were the subject of lively discussions in a conversational community of young working-class intellectuals during the First World War. The leading figures of this informal café club—called “The Decameron Club”—were the young poets Kössi Ahmala (1889–1918), Kasperi Tanttu (1886–1918), and Emil Lindahl (1892–1937). Their texts personified “the new masculinity” in the figure of either a working-class bohemian or flâneur. Kasperi Tanttu was a self-educated poet and “a proletarian dandy,” well known in various political and cultural circles. In spite of his limited primary education, Tanttu mediated the traditions of world literature to working-class readers, especially to the younger generation. He admired the poetry of Byron and Shelley, and he translated a few of Shelley’s poems into Finnish. The Civil War put an abrupt and violent end to the visions and writings of these young poets, but they have continued to inspire new generations of working-class writers.

1 The writing of this article has been funded by a fellowship from Academy of Finland entitled “Between voice and paper: Authorial and narrative strategies in oral-literary traditions.”
A PROLETARIAN DANDY
The complex relationship of socialism, working-class culture, and fin de siècle decadence has been explored in recent international research (Parente-Čapková 2009; Sumpter 2008, 131–74). Focusing on decadent aspects in early twentieth-century working-class Finnish literature, I begin with a forgotten detail: the translations of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s revolutionary poems by a Finnish working-class writer, Kasperi Tanttu (1886–1918). This case study provides new insights into international influences on Finnish working-class culture.

Kasperi Tanttu was well known in various political and cultural circles as a controversial character, a self-educated poet and “a proletarian dandy.” During his last years, he was one of the leading characters in the conversational community of young working-class intellectuals in Helsinki. For this reason, Tanttu served as one case study in my research on handwritten newspapers as an alternative medium in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finland. Raoul Palmgren’s evaluations of Tanttu have been repeated by writers of later generations. Commenting on Tanttu’s character, Palmgren describes him in the following way: “The sudden revolutionary interest of Kasperi Tanttu was not taken seriously by all people in the labor movement, since he was a quite small, soft-hearted, adored beauty and dressed up in a bohemian manner” (1966, 318–19). At the end of the chapter, Palmgren evaluates the life and works of Kasperi Tanttu as follows: “If only his personality had been more concise, firm, and independent, he would have been among the best of the working-class writers. Now he has remained in the second class” (320). However, Palmgren praises Tanttu’s achievements in mediating significant works in international socialist poetry and literature (Shelley, Ferdinand Freiligrath, and Emile Verhaeren) into Finnish working-class literature. Tanttu shared his interest in world literature with the other young working-class poets of his generation, and, even though his basic formal education was very limited, among his peers, Tanttu was the most ambitious and had the greatest general knowledge of world literature.

After tracing various source materials on Kasperi Tanttu’s life for several years in different archives and in private collections, a few years ago I discovered his “X-files” in the Finnish National Archives. After Tanttu’s death, the White Guards had confiscated all the papers found in his home. These papers included extensive correspondence, lecture notes, and manuscripts. These archived documents remain to this day in their original, rather chaotic order, and I have studied them only partially. The archives provide new information on Tanttu’s social life, character, and

2 All translations are by Kirsti Salmi-Niklander.
literary ideas. His lecture notes for the study circle of the Helsinki Social Democratic Youth Society (1917) reveal his extensive, albeit self-taught, scholarship in world literature, especially Renaissance culture; it is thus quite probable that Tanttu was the one who invented the name for “The Decameron Club,” the informal club for young working-class writers and intellectuals.

**Young Poets of “The Decameron Club”**

During the first years of the First World War, young working-class people from all parts of Finland gravitated to Helsinki and to the Social Democratic Youth Society. At that time, the Grand Duchy of Finland was officially at war, although the Russian government did not call Finns to arms. This state of war gave the Russian government an opportunity to intensify censorship and to restrict the organizational activities in Finland (Parkkari 1970, 49–50).

Many young Finnish socialists supported revolutionary ideas, which made them a thorn in the side of the authorities. During this time, formal meetings were forbidden, and the police even turned the members of the Society out of their regular picnic spot on an island near Helsinki. To continue their political activities, the members organized informal meetings on the ice of the sea gulf in the middle of Helsinki or took walks outside the town. The newspaper of the Social Democratic Youth, *Työläisnuoriso* (Working-class youth), was suppressed in the fall of 1914, but a new paper, entitled *Nuoriso* (The youth), was founded the following year (Arajärvi 1915; Parkkari 1970, 49–50; Salmi-Niklander 2005, 2006).

The Society bought the premises of a restaurant and renovated it into a society hall and a popular café. This café became the meeting place of the informal club of the young working-class intellectuals, which was to be named “The Decameron Club.” The leading figures of this club were the young male poets Kasperi Tanttu, Kössi Ahmala (1889–1918), and Emil Lindahl (1892–1937). All of them had moved to Helsinki from other parts of Finland, looking for work and broader intellectual perspectives.

Kössi Ahmala was a crofter’s son from northwestern Finland, born in Lumijoki and raised in the northern town of Oulu. He was remembered for his “manly handshake,” as well as for being a man of many contradictions. He was a poet and an organizer, a bohemian and a dutiful mail carrier, a supporter of free love and a devoted husband and father. Ahmala made his mark in history as “Lenin’s postman”: as Lenin sought refuge in Finland in 1917, Kössi Ahmala, who transported the mail by train between Helsinki and St. Petersburg, carried the secret correspondence between

Picture 1. Kössi Ahmala assumed many roles: he was a poet, a bohemian, a mail carrier, a revolutionary, a pacifist, and a devoted husband and father. Photo: W. Dufva. Source: Kansan Arkisto (The People’s Archives).

Emil Lindahl was born to a poor, landless family, who resided in the countryside of Eastern Finland. After the death of his mother, Lindahl came to Helsinki as a young teenager and supported himself doing various jobs, such as being a baker’s assistant. During the 1910s, he first approached the Society of Freethinkers and then the Social Democratic Youth Society and was employed as its secretary. In this capacity, he and Kössi Ahmala organized literary evenings in 1916 (Palmgren 1966, 322; Emil Lindahl [Obituary] 1937).

Kasperi Tanttu joined the youth society in 1916 as a political convert, even though he had the strongest proletarian background of the young poets. He was born
to the very lowest stratum of Finnish society, as an illegitimate son of a woman who lived as a dependent lodger (saunaloinen) in Hirvensalmi in Eastern Finland. Tanttu made huge social and cultural strides through education, raising himself from the status of a shepherd boy and a farmhand to a journalist and a poet. An important turning point for him was attending a folk high school (Otavan opisto 1905–07), which filled the gaps in his primary education. Tanttu shuttled between various political and cultural circles; he had friends both among the established writers and among the young socialist intelligentsia as well as the members of the agrarian youth movement. As a poet, Tanttu published three collections of poetry (Tanttu 1912, 1913; Tanttu and Joutsenniemi 1915) and contributed to various journals. He shared his knowledge of world literature in his lectures at the study circle of the Social Democratic Youth Society and in a private literary club that met at his apartment. This private club hosted young girls and boys from the Youth Society. According to oral history sources (Rasku 1979), there were also rumors that he participated in “orgies” in that club, although the members denied those rumors (Palmgren 1966, 310–11; Salmi-Niklander 2010, 299–314).

At first, Kössi Ahmala and Kasperi Tanttu did not get along. For instance, they wrote defamatory poems and essays about each other’s writing and personalities. Nonetheless, they learned to tolerate each other, and their sparkling debates created the spirit of “The Decameron Club.” Their literary ideals were rather different, although they both criticized the tendentious literature that was supported by many older leaders of the Social Democratic party. Whereas Kasperi Tanttu still valued aesthetic ideals after his political radicalization in 1916, Kössi Ahmala asserted in his writings that class struggle should not be diluted by aesthetics (Sepeteus 1919; Palmgren 1966, 165, 315–19).

Kössi Ahmala, Kasperi Tanttu, and Emil Lindahl were leaders in their own small community. However, their attempts to publish books were not successful, as even the socialist publishers apparently found their texts to be far too radical. Kasperi Tanttu could not find a publisher for his last collection of poetry, which had more revolutionary content than his earlier poems. To combat their lack of success, Ahmala and Lindahl joined forces with other writers, founding the Union of Working-Class Writers (Työläiskynäillijöiden yhdistys) in 1917, and they even planned to establish a publishing company, but the Civil War abruptly put an end to these visions (Palmgren 1966, 165–66, 315–16; Roininen 1993, 394–99). From 1916 to 1917, Tanttu worked as an editor of the literary journal Viikko (Week), which provided an important means of publication for young working-class writers.
avoided censorship and suppression, probably because it focused on literary debates and avoided political discussion.

In this politically suffocating environment, the manuscript medium became important for the young, working-class, politicized writers. One of these writers was Ahmala, who revitalized the handwritten newspaper *Nuorukainen* (The young man) of the Helsinki Social Democratic Youth Society. In his first editorial (Feb 18, 1914), he sets four goals for the *Nuorukainen*. The first was to function as “a self-improvement paper” for writing practice, and the second was to be an important source for historians in times to come. Ahmala’s third goal was that the *Nuorukainen* was to serve as a medium to promote discussion among the members. The fourth goal was to help develop those who had talent in oratory performance. The society also produced another handwritten newspaper, *Itseopiskelijat* (The self-educated), which served as a medium for more inexperienced writers. Only one copy each of *Nuorukainen* and *Itseopiskelijat* was produced, which was common practice in the handwritten newspapers of the time, but they were circulated by public readings at political meetings and social evenings (Salmi-Niklander 2011, 221–35; 2013).

**KASPERI TANTTU, BYRON, AND SHELLEY**

Kasperi Tanttu, Kössi Ahmala, and Emil Lindhal all received their inspiration from world literature, from the classics and from contemporary writers. According to biographical sources, Lindahl used all his savings as a baker’s assistant to buy the volume of Dante’s *Divina Commedia* when it was translated into Finnish by Eino Leino in 1912 (Emil Lindahl [Obituary] 1937). Ahmala’s great hero was August Strindberg, and he dedicated one of his poems to him—while another poem (now lost) was dedicated to Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud.

Kasperi Tanttu published three translations of Shelley’s poems in the 1914 socialist literary yearbook *Kevättervehdys* (“Spring Greeting”): “Song to the Men of England” (“Laulu Englannin kansalle”), “Love’s Philosophy” (“Rakkauden filosofia”), and “Political Greatness” (also known as “Sonnet to the Republic on Benevento”). These translations are rather free because he has condensed the original four verses of “Love’s Philosophy” into three. In the translation of “Political Greatness,” the first two lines are consolidated into one. For example, the line, “Nor happiness, nor majesty, nor fame/nor peace nor joy nor skill in arts or arms” is literally translated as the following: “Nor happiness, nor fame, nor peace,” so that the first line of Tanttu’s
Nor Happiness, nor Majesty, nor Fame

translation is: “Ei onnea, ei mainetta, ei rauhaa.” Tanttu also gave a new title to this poem: “Tyrannien lauma” (“A crowd submitting to Tyrants”). Tanttu was a writer of sonnets himself, which may explain his choice of this relatively obscure work by Shelley, and despite his several changes, his translation captures the rhythm and spirit of the original.

Shelley is not a very widely read English poet in Finland, partly because his poetry is very difficult to translate. Tanttu’s admiration of this Romantic poet is related to his own controversial friendship with the well-established Finnish writer Joel Lehtonen (1881–1934), who was inspired by Shelley’s poetry, especially Queen Mab. Lehtonen published an essay “Shelleyyn hautalla” (At Shelley’s grave) in his collection of travel essays entitled Myritty ja alppiruusu (The myrtle and the rhododendron) (Lehtonen 1911; Tarkka 1977, 30–31). A collection of the Finnish translations of Shelley’s poetry was published in 1929, and the translation of his biography Ariel ou la vie de Shelley by Andre Maurois (1923) appeared in 1925 under the Finnish title Ariel eli Shelleyn elämä (Ariel: The life of Shelley). Yet Tanttu is the only writer who has translated and published Shelley’s political poems into Finnish.

Tanttu’s papers at the National Archives provide new evidence of the influence of British writers, especially Byron and Shelley, whom he introduced to Finnish working-class readers. The archives include some documents on his studies of the English language (a notebook and a letter from a Finnish American woman), although I have not detected any evidence of his participation in any formal English classes or courses. Among these archived materials is an essay manuscript (most likely unpublished), in which Tanttu expresses his deep admiration for Byron and Shelley. This manuscript was probably written in late 1917 or early 1918, since Tanttu makes references to the Russian Revolution in March 1917. This work was apparently crafted for some socialist publication, as he explains the importance of studying revolutionary predecessors. According to Tanttu, it is interesting to note that revolutionary ideas first attracted some aristocratic young men, who “got their artistic form in salons, in the centers of vice and gormandizing.” Tanttu considers skepticism as a “grain of mustard seed” from which the “oak trees reaching the sky” have grown.

Tanttu reviews the well-known facts of Byron’s and Shelley’s poetry and biography. His personal enthusiasm for their poetry is depicted in his poetic language, 3

---

3 The first verse of Tanttu’s translation rhymes fully: “Ei onnea, ei mainetta, ei rauhaa/nuo tyrannien tylsät orjat tunne./On turhaa, runoilijat runoilunne/he vaipuvat ja aallot yli pauhaa.”

4 “On erinomaisen mielenkiintoista historiasta havaita, että vapaus- ja vallankumousaatteet ovat ensiksi tulleet ilmoille ylhäisön nuorukaisten välyksellä, saaneet taiteellisen muotonsa hienoiston salongeissa, mässäyksen ja paheellisen elämän keskuksissa.” (Tanttu [1917–18])
which is almost as difficult to translate as the poetry of Byron and Shelley. Tanttu
claims that Shelley has “ridden with his gold-winged Pegasus to higher and lighter
spheres than any other immortal soul.” By contrast, Joel Lehtonen presents a some-
what different image of Shelley in his travel essay “Shelleyn haudalla” (At Shelley’s
grave) that appears in the collection of Myrtti ja alppiruusu. Lehtonen refers several
times to Shelley’s femininity and depicts him as “beautiful and unreachable”: “Like a
woman, transparent, blurred and frail.” Lehtonen praises Shelley’s poetic forms but,
at the same time, ridicules them: “This flower had a flower’s soul. [. . . ] Ridiculous!
An effeminate dreamer!”

**Proletarian Decadence**
Kasperi Tanttu’s life and writings were a part of a wider phenomenon in the ear-
ly twentieth-century Finnish working-class culture that entailed proletarian dec-
adence, which was related to the pro-feminist and anti-feminist debates and the
construction of a new working-class masculinity. This developed in parallel with
the re-evaluation of masculinity by the young German and Austrian socialists (espe-
cially Max Adler) during and after the First World War (Mosse 1996, 14, 119–32).
The young Finnish socialists were also influenced by the debates on feminism that
were stirred up by August Strindberg (Fahlgren 1994; Witt-Brattström 2007, 222–
58) and by the discussion of love, sexuality, and gender among the Russian socialists
(Katainen 2002).

In Finland, as in many other young nations, decadent phenomena were rejected
and despised, especially in the Fennoman cultural circles that promoted nationalistic
ideology and the Finnish language, because decadent phenomena were associated
with degeneration. The decadent trends in Finnish literature of the early twenti-
eth-century (for example, in Joel Lehtonen’s early, Neo-Romantic works) were for-
gotten by academic literary history until the late twentieth century (Lyytikäinen
1998, 13–14; Parente-Čapková 2009). This tendency to ignore decadent, feminine
writings was even stronger in Raoul Palmgren’s monographs on working-class liter-
ature, especially in his evaluation of Tanttu’s character and writings.

Even though the hegemonic ideology of the labor movement praised self-dis-
cipline and conservative literary ideals, many working-class writers were inspired
by the decadent ideas of the early twentieth century. The great influence of Oscar

"Kaunis ja saavuttamaton hän oli. Kuin nainen, kuultavan hämärä ja hento. Hänen mu-
otonsa kauneutta kadehdin niin kuin laiseni voi. Ja samalla sitä pilkkaan: siinä kukkasessa oli
kukkaisielen. [...] Kuitenkin pyrki rakentamaan tuhatvuotista valtakuntaa, onnen ja ihmisyyden.
Naurettavaa! Naishaaveilija!” (Lehtonen 1911, 75–76)
Wilde on Finnish literary and cultural life has not been thoroughly studied, but the theater historian Helka Mäkinen has analyzed the reception of the performance of Wilde’s *Salome* in the Finnish National Theatre in 1906 (2001, 39–82). The reviews in the newspapers were contradictory, but the play became a huge success and an important performance for the talented young actress, Elli Tompuri (1880–1962). The rebellious spirit of *Salome* reflected the political atmosphere in Finland following the General Strike of 1905, and the socialist newspaper *Työmies* published a positive review. As a consequence, when *Salome* toured Finland, it was performed to full houses. A glowing review in the January 1906 issue of the well-established journal *Valvoja* also highlighted the acceptance of Oscar Wilde into mainstream Finnish cultural life.

Viola Parente-Čapková (2009) has outlined the political aspects of decadence in Finnish literature. Some basic features that are associated with the decadence of the time were the political and aesthetic transgression of the established limits and taboos, and the autonomy and the self-centeredness of art and the artist (Parente-Čapková 2009, 16–17; Pynsent 1989, 142). Decadence has also been considered to be an upper-class phenomenon, with the decadents mocking and shocking the bourgeois from above (Pynsent 1989, 153). However, decadent elitism and socialist ideas were unified in the life and writings of Oscar Wilde, who in spite of his aristocratic background, greatly influenced the young, working-class socialists in many European countries. Kasperi Tanttu was not unique as a “proletarian dandy,” although no systematic analysis has yet been conducted on this phenomenon (Parente-Čapková 2009, 20). There were also other bohemian and controversial characters among the Finnish working-class writers. One of them was Esa Paavo-Kallio (1858–1936), who is discussed by Kati Launis in this volume.

The standard characters in decadent literature, the dandy and the flâneur, appeared in the literature referred to as *Dagdrivare* (Day drifter) and written by the young Swedish-speaking writers Torsten Helsingius, Ture Janson, and Erik Grotenfelt in the early 1900s. Their heroes are young upper- or middle-class men who lead a drifting life in Helsinki and embark on erotic escapades (Grönstrand 2009; Molarius 1998).

Ahmala, Tanttu, and Lindahl produced proletarian versions of these flâneur stories in their poetry, prose, and literary lives. Tanttu carefully cultivated his self-image to be that of a proletarian dandy. His style of dressing has been described

---

6 Aimo Roininen lists the reviews that were written on the performances of Oscar Wilde’s plays in Finnish theaters (Roininen 1993, 427).
in detail in many memoirs. For example, Tanttu would wear a worn-out swallowtail coat, but the most memorable part of his attire was a broad, fan-shaped bow tie with red and white stripes (Rasku 1979). Both Ahmala and Lindahl dressed in bohemian apparel, which they wore in the informal get-togethers at the Decameron Club. For instance, Ahmala wore a broad-brimmed hat and an overcoat with a cape, and he smoked an English-style pipe. Lindahl dressed in a straw hat with a bow (Palmgren 1966, 165; Sepeteus 1919).

**FALLEN GIRLS AND BIRD CHERRY BLOSSOMS**

One of the basic aspects of decadent literature is its controversial relationship to women and women’s emancipation (Parente-Čapková 2009, 29–32). Raoul Palmgren makes some very interesting observations about the anti-feminist tendencies of Finnish working-class literature. The male writers Ali Aaltonen (1884–1918), Kalle Rissanen (1885–1958), and Kaarlo Uskela (1878–1922) reversed the traditional plot, in which a working-class girl is seduced and deserted by an upper- or middle-class man. Their stories depicted a woman who often assumed the role of the active seducer who would then exploit men. Palmgren refers to this tendency as revolutionary in relation to the labor movement’s traditionally positive attitude towards women’s emancipation (1966, 136–37). Aaltonen polemicized against women’s emancipation in his story “Taistelu” (Battle, 1910) by stating, “Has anyone ever held speeches for a man, who lies beneath the heavy yoke of a woman? [. . .] The other half of mankind rests in their chains and praises them, which is indeed a shame!”

The new norms of “free love” were intensely debated by the community of young socialist intellectuals in handwritten and printed publications. Young male writers expressed their critical views of “emancipated women.” In his essay in Viikko, Kasperi Tanttu praised the genius of L. Onerva, the best-known Finnish decadent writer; however, Tanttu also expressed his suspicious attitude toward a woman’s capacity for creative work (Tanttu 1916a). Indeed, Ahmala, Tanttu, and Lindahl discussed sexuality more openly than most working-class writers of their time. These authors use the characters and images of decadent literature—flâneurs and fallen women—who are then portrayed in a working-class context. These stories are

---

7 “Onko kukaan pitänyt puheita miehestä, joka lepää naisen raskaan ikeen alla [. . .] että toinen puoli ihmiskunnassa lepää kahleissa, ylistää kahleitaan, se on sentään häpeällistä!” (Aaltonen 1910)
based on the classic plot of “boy-meets-girl,” and they include some autobiographical elements.

Kössi Ahmala’s posthumous collection *Hirsipuita* (Gallows, 1919) includes short stories that have fictional plots and characters, and semi-autobiographical stories. These works all depict the observations and experiences of a young, white-collar worker and part-time bohemian who closely resembles Ahmala himself. Raoul Palmgren states that one of Ahmala’s best pieces of prose is “Satamakuvia” (Harbor scenes), in which the narrator observes night time scenes and people in the dark alleys of Helsinki harbor. This collection includes some romantic stories. One of these is “Lola” (Ahmala 1919, 102–7), in which the first-person narrator, apparently Ahmala’s alter ego, meets a beautiful waitress at a ramshackle café in the back streets of Helsinki. The narrator admires her beauty and wit, which attracts customers to the cafe. The girl is willing to take a walk with him after the café is closed, and he observes that she has a rather expensive-looking fur coat for a poor waitress. During this stroll, she suggests that she could follow him to his apartment. There Lola recounts the tragic and ordinary story of her life: a poor young girl from the countryside who comes to the city and is seduced and then practically raped by a wealthy middle-aged customer. The narrator and Lola become friends, and he observes her “witty and intelligent” comments regarding the paintings on his walls and some photographs that he shows her. Finally she makes an erotic overture: “With uncertain steps she approached me and put her arms around me, avoiding my eyes. As if she owed me something. . . But I just couldn’t. I raised her on her feet. We put our overcoats on and without exchanging a single word, I escorted her to the gate of the café.” The narrator explains his solution: “She was already used to a certain way of living. At most I could have disturbed her peace of mind, and it would have been too heartless to poor Lola.”

Ahmala’s “Lola” belongs to the tradition of Finnish realistic prose, beginning with Juhani Aho’s short novel, *Yksin* (Alone, 1890), which has a sequence describing the narrator’s one-night stand with a prostitute in Paris (Nummi 2002, 281–85). Emil Lindahl’s short story, “Kun synti on täytetty” (When the sin is fulfilled),

---

resembles Ahmala’s “Lola” in its basic plot, but the style of Lindahl’s story is far more naturalistic. Lindahl published this work in the handwritten newspaper of the Social Democratic Youth Society, *Itseopiskelijat*, during the Civil War in early 1918 and in print after the Civil War in the journal *Suvijuhla* (Lindahl 1918, 1919a). It is very probable that both Ahmala and Lindahl had either read or heard each other’s stories. Lindahl’s story is more fictionalized than “Lola” since the main character is a young man named Feodoroff. This name suggests that the story might not have taken place in Finland, but in Russia; however, no detailed references to any actual places are provided. As in Ahmala’s “Lola,” the short story is set in the ramshackle cafés, streets, and apartments of an anonymous city. In contrast, in Lindahl’s story, Feodoroff meets an anonymous young woman, this time not in a café, like Ahmala’s character, but at a party at his friend’s apartment. The young woman remains anonymous, and the entire story is told from the point of view of the young Feodoroff. He is attracted to this young woman, and she is not literally a prostitute, but a homeless girl who spends her days in cafés and her nights with occasional companions. The narrator depicts in great detail the fulfilment of sexual passion, which is followed by his disgust as he wakes up next to the girl and feels lice crawling in his bed.

Kasperi Tanttu took the discussion of free love to extremes by supporting bigamy (or polyamorism, in post-modern terms) in his best-selling booklet... vain *kaksi* (... only two, 1917; Palmgren 1966, 315). This booklet is a lightly narrated story of a man with two wives and how they finally create an unconventional *ménage à trois*. The most surprising turn is the end, when it is openly stated that all three are engaging in a consensual sexual relationship, and the “first wife’s” main motivation for this unconventional solution is her attraction to her husband’s female lover.

Kasperi Tanttu actually revealed very little about his private life in his prose. The only autobiographical works are some letters from his home village, which he published in the literary journal *Viikko* in 1916. He spent his summers in Hirvensalmi in a small cottage that he built for his mother. He withdrew during the summers for weeks, sometimes months, to this “hermit’s cottage” to enjoy a healthy country life. The letter entitled “Tuomenkukkatunnelmia” (Emotions on bird cherry blossoms) was written in early June 1916 and published on June 17, 1916. This letter describes the routines of his country life, including his cooking coffee and potatoes, until the overpowering scent of the bird cherry blossoms makes him forget these chores. This scent brings him back to the year of 1906, the summer after the General Strike, when he had returned home for a vacation after his first year in the Folk High School.
At that time, his head was full of “Sturm und Drang” after the political turmoil, but all this was swept away by his first love:

I dreamed at night of my golden-haired girl, during the days I thought of her only with pure and honorable thoughts.
Then I thought that love should be purified of all carnality.
My love was pure and it stayed pure—too pure, this purity was its death.
I was left in my dreams—in my pure dreams—to break the bird cherry blossoms. My girl went to another man, who took care of her golden hair.  

The narrator continues and describes his later experiences with women: “Women with braids, with curls and with their hair in a bun. Women, like all kinds of women.” His emotional responses to women are a mixture of fascination, bitterness, and disgust, and they are embodied in the overpowering scent of bird cherry blossoms, which he places in a vase but then throws away the next day with “mixed, vague emotions.” At the end, he returns with a tone of resignation to the routines of his bachelor life.

“Letters from the countryside” constitute an exception in Tanttu’s writings. His description of his emotional disappointment is very different in light of the discussion of free love that the working-class youth engaged in. That discussion of free love also had a hidden agenda of heteronormativity, which is questioned in Kasperi Tanttu’s text, although between the lines, as it presents an effeminate man who cannot fulfill a woman’s desires and experience “healthy” sexuality (cf. Mosse 1994, 255–56).

**A Poet’s Death**

Both Kössi Ahmala and Kasperi Tanttu died violently at the end of the Finnish Civil War in 1918. Ahmala was a devoted pacifist, as were many other members of the Socialist youth movement. He never enlisted in the military during the Finnish Civil War, but he did serve as a mail carrier for the Red Administration, which held power in Helsinki and southern Finland during the first months of 1918. At the end of the Civil War, when he was transporting the mail by train, Ahmala was trapped in Viipuri in Eastern Finland. When the White Guards conquered Viipuri,
all the Red mail carriers were executed. According to different accounts, Ahmala faced his death heroically, shouting in front of the firing squad in the yard of the Viipuri Castle: “Long Live Freedom” or “Long Live Social Democracy!” (Palmgren 1966, 166). After Ahmala’s tragic death, his manuscripts suffered an unfortunate fate. During his lifetime, he had published his poems in working-class journals and almanacs and in printed and handwritten newspapers. After Ahmala was executed, the manuscripts of his four books, which he had not managed to get published, vanished. Copies of these manuscripts were left with his widow Maikki Ahmala, who sold most of them after the Civil War to the Social Democratic Youth Society. It is interesting to note that the contract for this sale was signed by Emil Lindahl. The Society published one of these manuscripts, Hirsiipuita (Gallows) in 1919, but the rest of them were lost during the 1920s (Palmgren 1966, 171). Ahmala’s remaining manuscripts were in the possession of Maikki Ahmala, who lent them to the left-wing writer Arvo Turtiainen for his literary essay in 1936, and again in the 1950s to Raoul Palmgren for his monograph, which appeared in 1966. In short, Ahmala served as an inspiring model for the two new generations of working-class writers in the 1930s and in the 1960s. In 2003, his manuscripts were donated to the People’s Archives by his granddaughter.

Kasperi Tanttu’s last days are the subject of many contradictory stories. The most plausible account is presented in Mirja Turunen’s monograph, Veripellet (Blood fields, 2005). Kasperi Tanttu was employed by the Red Administration, which was in power in Helsinki as well as in southern Finland, as a secretary of the Revolutionary Court of Justice. When the White Guards and the German troops occupied Helsinki in April 1918, Tanttu fled to Viipuri with the other officials in the Red Administration. During his last weeks in Viipuri, Tanttu had a notorious photograph taken of him dressed up as “a Red Guard commander” and posing with gestures that imitated Napoleon. During the next chaotic weeks, he fled from Viipuri back to Finland and was arrested and almost executed by the Red Guards as a “White provocateur,” since he protested against the Red terror in Hamina. Although we have only his own story to attest to the events (Varto 1998, 41–42), Tanttu was saved at the last moment by a crowd, comprised mostly of women, who opposed the execution of an innocent man who belonged to the Reds. After this close brush with death, Tanttu converted once again to the Whites and sought protection among the White Guards in Kouvola. However, Tanttu naively introduced himself to some White officers at a restaurant in Kouvola, and was executed immediately. The photograph of him was disseminated in the press, and Kasperi
“Nor Happiness, nor Majesty, nor Fame”


Picture 2. Kasperi Tanttu’s notorious photograph featuring him dressed up as a Red Guard commander was probably taken in Viipuri during the last chaotic weeks of the Civil War. This photograph was published in the press and distributed as a postcard. Source: Kansan Arkisto (The People’s Archives). Photo: Attributed to V. Sihvonen (according to the staff at the Finnish Museum of Photography, this attribution is doubtful).
“The Napoleon photograph” has puzzled many writers. Some have interpreted this as a serious indicator that Tanttu actually rose to an important position in the Red Guards. However, I have not found any evidence of his participation in any military activity. It is probable that this photograph constitutes the only time that Tanttu ever held a gun (Cederberg 1961). After reading the various stories of Tanttu’s death, it is increasingly obvious that it was neither a coincidence nor an accident, even though those who did the “dirty work” probably did not know the real reasons why it was so important to get rid of him. Perhaps Tanttu was a man who knew too much about too many people.

After the Civil War, the memory of Tanttu was erased, since he was considered to be a traitor by both the Whites and the Reds. During the 1950s, an interest in Tanttu as a working-class writer was revived in the anthology entitled *Käy eespäin* (Go forward) (Ahmala et al. 1957), whereas in the publications by the White side, he continued to live as the fictional character he had created, “The Napoleon of Finland” (Malmberg et al. 1934).

Emil Lindahl was the only one of these young poets who survived the Civil War. He apparently hid during the siege of Helsinki and never took part in the military. After the war, he joined the communist faction of the labor movement and worked as the editor-in-chief of the printed newspaper of the young communists, *Nuori Työläinen* (Young worker) and for *Sosialistinen Aikakauskirja* (Socialist journal). Lindahl was sentenced to prison for these activities from 1923 to 1924, and, as a consequence, he withdrew from all communist activities and got a job as a proof-reader at a social democratic newspaper. Lindahl subsequently published two collections of poetry (1919b and 1937) and wrote many memoirs of the Decameron Club and Kössi Ahmala. According to the files of the Security Police (EK-Valpo), Lindahl had problems with alcohol. He died in a traffic accident in Helsinki in 1937.

**Grain of a Mustard Seed**

Kössi Ahmala, Emil Lindahl, and Kasperi Tanttu influenced many young working-class people who read their writings or listened to their lectures and conversations. I have observed the images of the proletarian dandies and *flâneurs* from 1914 to 1925 in the handwritten newspaper *Valistaja* (The enlightener), which was edited by the young working-class people in Högfors (Karkkila), a small industrial town in southern Finland (Salmi-Niklander 2004). During the last three years that *Valistaja* was published (1922–25), the factory boys “took over” the paper with their travel
stories. These stories were lengthy descriptions of excursions to neighboring towns and villages or to Helsinki (Salmi-Niklander 2004, 305–63; 2007).

Members of the Högfors Social Democratic Youth Society read stories and poems by Kössi Ahmala, Emil Lindahl, and Kasperi Tanttu in newspapers and journals, and Emil Lindahl visited Högfors in the 1920s. One of the most active members of the Högfors Social Democratic Youth Society, a young latheman, Lennart Berghäll (1896–1929), moved to Helsinki in 1915 and became an active member. Berghäll eventually became the chairman of the Social Democratic Youth Society (Salmi-Nikander 2005). His poem, “Kurjalassa” (In a town of misery) (Berghäll [1917] 2005), summarizes well the new impulses he had been exposed to in Helsinki, but, for some reason, he decided not to publish it in Nuorukainen, the handwritten newspapers of the Helsinki Social Democratic Youth Society, but in Valistaja, the handwritten newspaper in his hometown.

The Mill of Grotte (in Lennart Berghäll’s poem, it is spelled as Krotte) has its origins in ancient Nordic mythology. According to the myth, two female giants grind gold for King Frode with the Mill of Grotte. Swedish poet Viktor Rydberg re-interpreted the Mill of Grotte as a symbol of industrialization in the prose preface to the poem “Den nya Grottesången” (The new Grotte song) (1891). Rydberg’s poem portrays the new Mill of Grotte as demanding an increasingly larger workforce, with children even being sacrificed to this monstrous mill. The result was that the Mill of Grotte became a popular image in Finnish and Scandinavian working-class poetry (Furuland 1991, 123–28; Furuland and Svedjedal 2006, 62–68; Palmgren 1989, 57–58). For instance, both Emil Lindahl and Kasperi Tanttu published Grotte poems (Lindahl 1919b, 83; Tanttu 1912, 30). The theme of Lennart Berghäll’s poem was that of workers suffering in the factory under the capitalists’ yoke. This theme is hardly unique and the imagery was somewhat awkward, but the rhythm of the poem is original, imitating the endless thump of machines, or the turning of the giant wheel of capitalism:

Krotten mylly työhön soittaa
koneen ääreen kurjat nuo
joille nuoruus vielä koittaa
vaan elo nuoruus riemuja ei suo.

Krotten rattaat vinhaan pyörii,
remmit kiitäin lennättää
pölypilvet yllä hyöri
orjat työhön ennättää.
Pimennoissa orjat raataa
kiroin kärsii, hikoilee
hodelleissa herrat mässää,
ilkuu, nautii, himoitsee. (Berghäll [1917] 2005, 109)

“The Mill of Grotte calls to work
those miserable ones
who still are young
but youth brings no pleasure.

The Wheels of Grotte are spinning fast
the straps are flying
clouds of dust above
the slaves rushing to work.

In the darkness the slaves are drudging
swearing, sweating, suffering.
In the hotels the gentlemen are stuffing themselves,
jeering, enjoying, craving.”

There is a small clue at the end of Lennart Berghäll’s poem concerning the influence from British poetry. The last verses read, “The Fairies are playing a hymn of victory” (Keijut voitonvirtä soittaa). I have not found any other references to fairies in Finnish working-class poetry, but Caroline Sumpter’s (2008, 88–130) research on fairies in late nineteenth-century British socialist literature placed this apparently irrelevant detail into a wider context.

At the end of his essay on Shelley and Byron, Tanttu outlines a historical continuity that runs from Byron and Shelley to the revolutionaries of the late nineteenth-century, until the early twentieth century: “Shelley’s skylark song reaching the heaven raised up depressed minds; Byron’s thunder cleaned up the air of the Holy Alliance; freedom fighters turned up from all parts of Europe.” Here Tanttu refers to the struggles of the nihilists and the revolutionaries in late nineteenth-century Russia, and finally to the fall of Nicholas II in the March Revolution of 1917, “The grain of the mustard seed had done its job,” declaring the influence of both Byron and Shelley. Tanttu depicts the “unusual poet’s death” that both Byron and Shelley faced, and in the process, presents some inaccurate historical facts. According to Tanttu, Byron burned Shelley’s dead body “at midnight on a mountain” after Shelley

10 “Shelleyyn taivastavoitteinen leivonlaulu nosti masentuneet mielet, Byronin jylisevä ukkonen puhdisti ‘Pyhän Allianssin’ ilmaa, vapaustaistelijoita nousi kaikista Euroopan kolkista” (Tanttu [1917–1918]).
had drowned on a boat trip, although actually this burning of Shelley’s body happened on a beach in Italy.

Kasperi Tanttu’s Shelley translations are one example of the lost opportunities of Finnish working-class literature. The re-evaluation of working-class masculinity by Ahmala, Lindahl, and Tanttu came to an abrupt and violent end in the Finnish Civil War. Like Byron and Shelley, Ahmala and Tanttu each faced an early, violent, and unusual “poet’s death”; Emil Lindahl also died tragically and prematurely. The first line of Shelley’s “Political Greatness,” “Nor happiness, nor majesty, nor fame” is sadly applicable to their life stories. Nevertheless, their writings were a “grain of a mustard seed,” which inspired new generations of Finnish working-class writers for decades to come.

References
Fahlgren, Margaretha. 1994. Kvinnans ekvation: Kön, makt och rationalitet i Strindbergs författarskap [A woman’s equation: Gender, power, and rationality in
Strindberg’s authorship]. Stockholm: Carlsson.


Ketola, Eino. 1918. “Kun synti on täytetty” [When the sin was fulfilled]. Handwritten newspaper Itseopiskelijat, March 6. Helsingin nuorisoseura [Helsinki Social Democratic Youth Society]. Helsinki: Kansan Arkisto [The People’s Archives].

———. 1919a. “Kun synti on täytetty” [When the sin was fulfilled]. Suvijuhla I, 10–11.


———. 1917. . . . vain kaksi [ . . . only two]. Helsinki: Kustannusliike Sana.


Hanne Koivisto
University of Turku

ABSTRACT

The layer of the educated classes and intelligentsia was thin in Finland in the 1930s and 1940s. One of the most internationally oriented was a Helsinki-based group, whose members called themselves left-wing intellectuals. In spite of numbering only about twenty men and women, the group was both vocal and visible. Today the group offers a fascinating opportunity to observe clashes between ideologies and conflicts within the labor movement, as well as the ambivalent and problematic relationship of the Finns with the Soviet Union. Paradoxically, it appears that neither decade was favorable for the group, in spite of the decades’ strikingly different political ethos. The most active periods for left-wing intellectuals were the years 1933 to 1938 and 1944 to 1948. Both of these periods resulted in profound frustration for the members of the group, who could never realize their cultural objectives. Even worse, most contemporaries thought that their ideas and aims were simply wrong. In the present article, the author analyzes internationalism among left-wing intellectuals, its expression as well as its significance to working-class culture and literature in Finland.

POLITICAL INTELLECTUALS AND INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

The activities of Finnish left-wing intellectuals repeated the pattern seen in other countries around the same time. Similar groupings of intellectuals had arisen

---

1 The author thanks Timothy Ashplant and Pekka Niemi for valuable help with a number of content issues and the English language.
throughout the western world in the 1920s and 1930s, attracting students, journalists, authors, and artists. In his reader about New York intellectuals, Neil Jumonville defines them as “public intellectuals” who wrote articles, reviews, critiques, and columns about timely topics (2007, 1). Cultural debates required fast responses to contemporary issues, and often there was not enough time to write books in order to address these issues.

Many left-wing intellectuals joined socialist or communist parties. Avant-garde art took on a political flavor with the formation of the anti-fascist front—in the United Kingdom, for example, around the magazines *Left Review* and *New Writing* (Heinemann 1988). British, French, and Scandinavian intellectuals and their magazines became models for Finnish left-wing intellectuals (see also Williams 1988a; Zeldin 1981; Thing 1993).

From the very start, Finnish left-wing intellectuals’ emphasis on internationalism was bluntly rejected by their nationally minded contemporaries. Ironically, they faced an equally determined opposition after the Second World War, this time from the other then-powerful political force, the Communist Party. My aim is to analyze the international orientation of Finnish left-wing intellectuals in two very different political situations: before and after the Second World War. How did they demonstrate their strong and universal sense of solidarity, which they referred to as their shared destiny or camaraderie in fate? I also consider how they wrote about this sense of solidarity in their articles about international literature and authors. Particularly interesting is their passionate orientation towards American, French, and Soviet literature. My further aim is to show that this was a vital part of their fully conscious identification process and their striving after a better world. Finally, I outline the significance of their international orientation for Finnish working-class culture and literature in the 1930s and 1940s.

### The First Steps toward Internationalism

Finnish left-wing intellectuals came from different walks of life. The most notable among them were the cultural critic and journalist, and, later, university professor Raoul Palmgren (1912–95); poet and journalist Jarno Pennanen (1906–69); politician, member of parliament, and socialist theoretician Cay Sundström (1902–59); editor, writer, publisher, and member of parliament Kaisu-Mirjami Rydberg (1905–59); editor and theater critic Maija Savutie (1910–88); poet and journalist Arvo Turtiainen (1904–80); and editor, writer, and translator Elvi Sinervo (1912–86) (for Sinervo, see Torninoja-Latola, this volume). Although some of these people
were members of parliament, representing the left wing of the Social Democratic Party, their most important arenas were cultural organizations of the Left, such as Tulenkantajat (Torch bearers) and Kirjailijaryhmä Kiila (Author group Wedge), the latter being founded by them in 1936. The purpose of Kiila was to promote progressive literature, art, and theater, to resist war and fascism, and to advance pacifism (Koivisto 2002).

Contacts were established with Scandinavian, particularly Swedish, sister organizations, the international peace movement, and, to a lesser extent, with the then-underground Communist Party, which was a mediator of Soviet political and cultural materials. Contacts were also made with Scandinavian colleagues who visited Finland during the cultural festival Nordic Literature Days in 1935. Among these colleagues were Karin Boye of Denmark, and Eyvind Johnson, Arnold Ljundal, and Vilhelm Moberg of Sweden (Rinne 2006, 50, 112).

Left-wing intellectuals had the means to keep abreast of international trends because many of them had studied at the university, some completing a degree. They were able to read, translate, and discuss in a number of languages, including Swedish, English, French, and German. Russian, however, was not mastered because it had been abolished from the school curriculum after Finland gained its independence in 1917. Therefore, Russian works were translated from other European languages. Kaisu-Mirjami Rydberg, for example, distinguished herself as an expert on the English language with her British pronunciation receiving admiration. She translated American and British prose, drama, and lyrics. Swedish-speaking Cay Sundström corresponded in French with Henri Barbusse. German was generally mastered. This made it possible to read socialist theory as well as German lyrics and prose in the original language. Raoul Palmgren, for example, was influenced by German theoreticians Wilhelm Hausenstein and Franz Mehring when he developed his ideas about Marxist aesthetics (Sallamaa 1994, 138).

The American intellectual Irving Howe notes: “When intellectuals can do nothing else, they start a magazine” (Howe 1979, xv). The Finnish left-wing intellectuals strongly agreed. In the 1930s, they published the Left-oriented Tulenkantajat (Torch bearers), which reported on cultural life and politics. Soihtu (Torch) carried information about socialist theory and was supported by the Social Democratic Party. Kirjallisuuslehti (Literature magazine) was supported and distributed by the Communist Party. Because the Communist Party was illegal in Finland, the connection was camouflaged carefully, and the magazine gave the appearance of a generally leftist cultural forum. After the Second World War, left-wing intellectuals
published the magazine *40-luku* (The 1940s) and several literary anthologies under the umbrella of Kiila group. Many of them worked as journalists for newspapers such as *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti* (Finnish Social Democrat), *Vapaa Sana* (Free word) published by the Finnish People’s Democratic League, and *Työkansan Sanomat* (Working people’s news), which was controlled by the Communist Party. In pre-war years, the cultural magazines of the Left had quite a number of readers because political writings of the extreme Left were regulated heavily by the authorities as a consequence of the so-called Communist Laws passed in 1930. Therefore, culture became a kind of a detour to societal visibility and influence. The situation was reversed after the war and, ironically, this state of affairs turned out to be fatal for leftist cultural magazines.

In their magazines, the left-wing intellectuals monitored both Finnish and international politics, culture, and social movements. They wrote themselves and translated articles published by Scandinavian and Western European leftist cultural magazines. Some material was also received from the Soviet Union. Foreign literature and magazines were acquired during visits abroad. Kaisu-Mirjami Rydberg even joined a leftist Anglo-American book club to get access to information. Because visits abroad were expensive, they were often sponsored by some club or society, such as a peace association, which the traveler then represented formally. During these visits, left-wing intellectuals had a chance to meet like-minded individuals from Scandinavia, Western Europe, and even more remote places, and to establish networks with them. Only a few of them visited the Soviet Union during the 1930s because the Finnish authorities were reluctant to grant travel permits.

### The French Popular Front as the Spiritual Home

During the pre-war years, the left-wing intellectuals had a strong sense of solidarity with their co-ideologists. Poets like Katri Vala ([1934] 1977) and Viljo Kajava ([1935] 2000) wrote how chains and cables of hearts encircle the globe that shakes with fright. They wrote also of brothers and sisters around the world who suffer from oppression. The style used by the leftist poets after the Second World War was that of expressionist poetry. They argued for a new humanism, a bridge of power, representing the masses, which eventually would carry all to a better future. Left-wing intellectuals admired Katri Vala as their forerunner because, through her poetry, she had led the way to internationalist modernism (Koivisto 2013).

The other source of these expressions was the internationalist thinking of the Social Democratic labor movement. Feelings of solidarity gained strength from the
international peace movement, as both the bourgeois and leftist variants of it emphasized solidarity. The European peace movement became more active in the 1930s when political tension between nations increased. A number of well-known politicians and writers joined this movement, among them the German Thomas Mann and the Frenchman Romain Rolland. The result was a short-lived epoch referred to as The International Peace Campaign, launched in 1936. Before the Second World War, this coalition had followers from forty-three countries. Moreover, twenty-five international organizations were involved. In Finland, the number of members was 120,000, and in the rest of Europe, it was multiple. Lord Cecil, the leading figure of the movement, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1937 for his contributions (Kalemaa 1981, 55–57, 68–71).

A vital ideological foundation for international thinking was the Clarté Movement. The French author Henri Barbusse started a leftist but politically independent “International of Souls” in 1919, which was meant for those involved in intellectual work. Its slogan read: “spiritual fighters of all countries, unite.” Clarté was soon started in Sweden (1921), in Norway (1925), and in Denmark (1926). When Jarno Pennanen and others tried to achieve the same in Finland in 1935, the authorities, resorting to Communist Laws and referring to the fact that Henri Barbusse had soon after the foundation joined the French Communist Party, did not permit the organization. However, as literary scholar Kari Sallamaa has pointed out, virtually all leftist cultural organizations in Finland shared the tenets of the Clarté Movement during the 1930s (Sallamaa 1994, 57; see also Koivisto 2011, 64–65).

In the 1930s, Barbusse and Rolland were involved in the establishment of the French Popular Front, which soon unified French groups that opposed war and fascism. In Finland, Raoul Palmgren entered the events carefully into his diary. He drew on these notes in his 1953 roman à clef 30-luvun kuvat (Images of the 1930s), which he wrote under the pseudonym “R. Palomeri.” In his description of the epoch, Palmgren relates how the largest bourgeois party of France had allied with labor parties, and people could see the leaders of right-wing social radicals, social democrats, and communists shoulder-to-shoulder in front of the demonstration. Together they saw how the procession of a half-million demonstrators marched by for five hours. The speakers were party leaders, war veterans, intellectual workers, and representatives of various trade and cultural organizations. Among them, there were a number of journalists, writers, and artists. Crowds sang, by turns, the “Marseillaise” and the “Internationale” (Palomeri 1953, 341).
The tiny Finnish left-wing intelligentsia considered France its spiritual home from the middle of the 1930s until the end of the decade, trying to organize a similar broad-based movement in Finland. The Spanish Civil War broke out in the year 1936. It emphasized further the significance of the Popular Front in the thinking of Finnish left-wing intellectuals when volunteers from various countries, including Finland, started to join the Spanish Republican Army.

**Authors Showing the Way: Zola and Barbusse as Models**

Authors occupied a central position in the Popular Front movement. Even before the movement was established in Finland, local left-wing intellectuals discussed the relationship between literature and society. They also pondered on the tasks of a writer in the society, taking French authors as their models. In 1933, *Kirjallisuuslehti* published the essay about the significance of Zola by Henri Barbusse. Barbusse argued that Émile Zola had paved the way for the future. The writer’s task was to serve a cause or an ideology and to be useful for humankind in ways other than merely imparting beauty. Barbusse wrote about the lot of a writer: “Only he has got it right, who is able to bring about improvements. A leader can be only he who understands how to open people’s eyes” (Barbusse 1933, 8).

In the same year, 1933, Raoul Palmgren published an article in *Tulenkantajat* about writers’ position in society. According to him, the economic depression had thrown capitalism into a profound crisis and resulted in widespread spiritual chaos. In such circumstances, society needs the writer because art can exert an influence on social life. The time needed writers like Victor Hugo and Émile Zola had been and like Romain Rolland was then. Palmgren put forth his theses on the qualifications of a writer. He believed a writer should feel strongly responsible for his task as well as have a solid worldview and a political stance. Palmgren defined an ideal writer as a prophet who is leading the revolutionary procession:

> Before anything, the writer must be a forerunner. [...] A great writer is a social combatant, his goal is justice. A great writer is an apostle of humanity. He strives for a happy mankind. A great writer is a prophet who senses the great moving cause of the epoch and flashes it to the fore in front of the masses. (1933, 4)

---

2  All translations from Finnish to English are by Hanne Koivisto.
The significance of authors and fiction as a genre was underlined by the International Congresses in Defense of Culture, which were held from 1935 onward. The first was arranged in Paris, with liberal and leftist writers gathering to ponder the state of the world, to promote peace, and to oppose fascism (Collier 1988a, 46–47). Finnish left-wing intellectuals followed the events enthusiastically. Detailed reports in their magazines covered what had been said and by whom. In his contributions, Palmgren discussed the participants of the first conference and concluded that they were the most brilliant intelligentsia of three continents (Palomeri 1953, 341).

Finnish left-wing intellectuals viewed themselves as belonging to this group—as authors, critics, and journalists who shared the same ideology, goals, and ideals. However, the enthusiasm evoked by the Popular Front movement and by authors as its driving force started to wane with the escalating armament policies of the leading powers of Europe. Although the Republicans were hard-pressed in the continuation of the Spanish Civil War, the Finnish left-wing intelligentsia wanted tenaciously to believe in the victory of Popular Front ideology.

**The Internationality of *Kirjallisuuslehti***

Among the magazines of the left-wing intellectuals, *Kirjallisuuslehti* (1932–38) in particular invested in introducing international literature to a Finnish readership. In its manifesto, the magazine declared that its aim was to cover social change and its impact on culture, particularly on literature, and the impact of this on people. The magazine believed in the power of literature. However, its political agenda was cloaked in cultural radicalism, which was said to be the engine of change (Rinne 2006, 29).

*Kirjallisuuslehti* was versatile and professionally edited. It published extensive and well-received thematic issues, introducing British, Spanish, Soviet, even Chinese culture (less known in Finland), from fine arts to music and literature. The thematic issue inspired by the Spanish Civil War, for example, included “Guernica,” by Pablo Picasso, and poems by Federico García Lorca (Cassou 1937, Parrot 1937). A number of internationally famous authors were introduced to its readers, including Americans Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Michael Gold, Langston Hughes, Sinclair Lewis, Jack London, John dos Passos, Carl Sandburg, and Upton Sinclair. It is fair to say that the list of authors and sample translations into Finnish were impressive in comparison with the dearth of international translations in mainstream publishing houses during the 1930s.
Figure 1. *Kirjallisuuslehti* took an international stand from its first issue onward. In addition to contributions from Finnish working-class authors, the magazine introduced Soviet as well as radical American and European authors. This December 1932 issue was archived by the then-underground Communist Party (SKP), as the stamp indicates. Photo: Yrjö Lintunen. Source: Kansan Arkisto (The People’s Archives).

Left-wing intellectuals emphasized the importance of their actions in a situation where publishers avoided contemporary works that were socially critical or avant-garde in form. Research by Erkki Sevänen, an art sociologist, confirms the significance of the left-wing intelligentsia as a supplier of modern international literature in Finland in the 1930s. In fact, publishing houses were quite selective when translating international literature, concentrating mostly on classic works and light reading. Only a small number of translated texts could be classified as modernist or socially critical (Sevänen 1994, 174).
Sevänen counts three literary lines as modernist. First are the British modernists, who criticized the industrial capitalist society from the value-conservative point of view and adopted fascist conceptions. The second line consists of socialist and utopian authors and, along with them, leading French surrealists and German expressionists, who believed that genuine humanity comes into being in a society flavored with socialism. As the third line, Sevänen lists Dadaists and those surrealists whose criticism of modernization was anarchist by nature (1994, 174–75). For Finnish left-wing intellectuals, the two latter groups were most appealing. Literary influences came also from Finland-Swedish modernists and Finnish and Swedish working-class poets.

The determined translation work of modernist and socially critical literature by left-wing intellectuals kept their channels open to the world when the other routes were already blocked. As late as in 1938, the editor-in-chief Jarno Pennanen wrote: “In the course of time, in events and history, we see the fate of contemporaries as one. The fate of the mankind of our time is indivisible. Therefore we all must act together” (Pennanen 1938, 205; see also Rinne 2006, 67–68).

**A School for Working-Class Authors and Theater Productions**

The left-wing intelligentsia was also in a broader sense important to the culture of the working class and its authors. In the absence of the left-wing intelligentsia possessing academic and language skills, members of the working class would have been without contact with the international peace initiatives, the Popular Front movement, and international cultural circles. Moreover, the lives of some working-class authors were directly influenced by the left-wing intelligentsia. For example, Jenny Pajunen and Lauri Vilenius, two Communist autodidact editors and writers, recalled contact with left-wing intellectuals as a spiritually enriching time when whole new worlds opened to them through cultural magazines and discussions. At the same time Pajunen and Vilenius underlined that they, too, working-class people, had things to give to left-wing intellectuals by informing them about their lives and experiences (Koivisto 2011, 290–91).

Literary critics coming from left-wing intellectual circles strove actively to improve the quality of works written by working-class authors. They conceived their task to be to guide these authors toward a writing style that would be both emancipatory and reflective of their author’s working-class identity. Many working-class authors, however, were afraid of the criticism, in particular from Raoul Palmgren, that a great social novel was expected from them. They felt that the
criteria for the right type of working-class literature set by him were too stringent (Rojola 1999, 343–44).

It is fair to say, however, that the stimulation brought by international literature mostly influenced the writing process of authors belonging to the circle of left-wing intellectuals. Translating pearls of world literature was a kind of writer’s school for them. Many of them translated Mayakovsky. Additionally, Maxim Gorky was translated by Elvi Sinervo, Edgar Lee Masters by Arvo Turtiainen, and reports by Egon Erwin Kisch by Kaisu-Mirjami Rydberg. The model poet Katri Vala was also an active translator—she focused on D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Carl Sandburg, and Walt Whitman. All these projects left traces on the content and form of the works produced by the translators themselves. The founding members of the Kiila group personally produced more than thirty works before the Second World War, mostly with bourgeois publishers. They were viewed as young prospects, particularly within their own circles (Rinne 2006, 34, 92).

Left-wing intellectuals also played an important role for the Working-Class Stage of Helsinki (Helsingin Työväen Näyttämö), founded in 1902. They translated, directed, staged, and contributed even as actors and actresses. Avant-garde theater was the theme. An activist and later editor Hilkka Ahmala remembers how evening sessions produced ideas for lighting and sound effects, the models being Ernst Toller, Erwin Piscator, Max Reinhardt, and the German tradition of group recitation (1951). Influences even included Chinese theater.

The launching of the working-class stage was dramatic, reflecting the tense political atmosphere of the time. The first premiere was *Strike Leader*, by I. J. Golden, which told a story based on the biography of an American trade union leader, Tom Mooney, who faced trial. The extreme right-wing Finnish Black Shirts, familiar with violent methods, had vowed to arrange a provocation to prevent the performance. It failed, however, because the sturdy wrestlers of the workers’ sports club Jyry (Thunder), together with comrades from harbor and construction sites, formed human chains along the walls of the hall. There they stood with stony faces during the entire performance. The drama was completed successfully (Rinne 2006, 38–39).

The most radical plays were the ones depicting American working-class culture, such as *Peace on Earth*, by Georg Sklar and Albert Maltz. Topicality was also important to the performances of the Working-Class Stage. For example, *Doomsday*, by Elmer Rice, was played as the European premiere. The audience was impressed, and, according to contemporaries, spirits were high, and the play was discussed long
afterwards (Ahmala 1951). The Finnish premiere of Rifles of Mrs. Carrar (1938), by Bertolt Brecht, about the Spanish Civil War, was also performed. Its world premiere had been in Paris a year before (Rinne 2006, 40–41; see also Williams 1988b, 308–9).

Later, when looking back at the 1930s, left-wing intellectuals believed that the most important of their activities was the attempt to bring light, albeit as a tiny opposition group, into the Finnish nationalistic “solid darkness.” Left-wing intellectuals maintained contacts with international culture and its avant-garde trends, in fact, being perfectly up-to-date with them. Also the Kiila group can be seen as a vanguard—the only one of its kind then in Finland (Sallamaa 1994, 288–91).

IN PRISON CELLS AND FREE AGAIN
The key members of the left-wing intelligentsia and the Kiila group were condemned to imprisonment during the Continuation War 1941–44 because of desertion or high treason—some of them on both accounts. The sentences were harsh because left-wing intellectuals had been trying to promote collaboration with the enemy-to-be, the Soviet Union. Also their aim to create a socialist Finland was deemed not only unpatriotic but also a threat to the independence of the country. The majority of Finns denounced them as traitors. Left-wing intellectuals were generally despised because they and underground Communists were seen, without nuance, as a monolithic bloc. Hardly surprisingly, left-wing intellectuals could not see their own activities in the way authorities and the majority of the Finnish people did (Koivisto 2011, 333–34).

These intellectuals lived in a reality of their own, composed of a spiritual contact with socialists in other countries and dreams about a happier socialist future. The harsh sentences came as a surprise, although even before the War they had already written anxiously in their magazines about the incarcerations of German colleagues in prisons and concentration camps. When facing the same fate, they felt companionship in misfortune with their German brothers and sisters (M.-L. Palmgren 1997, 21; R. Palmgren 1997, 228).

When Kaisu-Mirjami Rydberg recalled her own captivity years later, she emphasized feelings of solidarity with her co-ideologists. Her post-war newspaper articles, travel books, and poems reflected the same feelings. After the publication of Rydberg’s poetry collection Alkukallio (Rock of ages) in 1946, Aira Kolula, a member of the same circles, wrote in her review: “Her vision is more universal than that of anyone else before her, her battle field is not only our own country but the
whole world suffering from the war, continents whose shores are caressed by the
great oceans” (Kolula 1946, 325). Kolula pointed out that Rydberg’s collection was
the first Finnish left-wing intellectual account of the pre-war and war years; it was
“sensitive and vibrating in its pain” and “discreet, intellectual, and cultivated” (325).
Alkukallio was international not only in terms of motifs and poetic metaphors but
also because it included Rydberg’s translations and poetic conversations with, for
example, pacifist poems by the American modernist Archibald MacLeish. She lived
on the same wavelength of thought.

After the Second World War, Rydberg introduced to Finns and Finland the
idea of “citizen of the world.” As one of these citizens of the world, she revered
Paul Robeson, about whom she wrote several in-depth articles. Robeson was an
African American singer, who travelled around the world, a leftist in thought and
a sympathizer of the Soviet Union, where he was regarded as a fellow traveler with
a considerable propagandist advantage. Robeson highlighted how the Soviet Union
treated people from diverse ethnic backgrounds in an exemplary manner. He had,
according to Rydberg, a dream of a common mankind, a united world in which
money and race do not constrain free human growth (Rydberg 1945; 1947b).

Rydberg emphasized the same vision in her editorial work. Promoting equality
among all people was paramount for her, as was securing world peace and working
for socialism. She published her ideas in many forums, including the newspaper
Vapaa Sana (Free word) and the cultural magazine 40-luku (The 1940s). The mag-
azine, indeed, went under after just three years because of a lack of readership.
It was replaced by the magazine Suomi-Neuvostoliitto Seura (Finland-Soviet Union
Association), which, during Rydberg’s editorship, richly covered cultural matters,
including the Soviet Union and other nations as well.

Raoul Palmgren’s Radical Cultural Program
A dramatic turn took place in Finnish political life during the years immediately
following the war, as Finland was consumed by its all-important relationship with
the Soviet Union. The Communist Party became legal and had remarkable success
in the parliamentary elections in 1944. For left-wing intellectuals, the future looked
very promising, and many joined the ranks of the Communist Party. The choice was
not difficult after the break with Social Democrats and the ordeals during imprison-
ment, where the left-wing intellectuals learned to appreciate the determination of
communist fellow prisoners. Everyone had a lot to say and do. Art sociologist Risto
Turunen highlights the fact that in the new political climate left-wing intellectuals
nursed thoughts of revenge when encountering their old foes, right-wing rulers of
cultural life. Left-wing intellectuals were ready to fight for cultural dominance,
and they struggled to take over important posts in the State Broadcasting Company
(YLE), publishing houses, and the press. Their purpose was to redirect all of cul-
tural life. At one such event, Arvo Turtiainen, for example, blew his own trumpet
for having “whacked those bourgeois” (Turunen 2003, 179).

The cultural program of the Finnish People’s Democratic League was de-
signed by Raoul Palmgren. Its goal was to steer cultural life towards a more demo-
cratic course, to reform the school system, and to improve working conditions for
authors and artists. The point of departure was the speech he made in 1944 about
the cultural state of affairs in Finland. The aims of the speech were two-fold: first,
to re-connect with the 1800s, the great century of Finnish social, political, and cul-
tural development, and second, to import from there the best heritage of national
culture so that it could become the basis of socialist Finnishness. In this way it was
possible to dismiss the pre-war tradition of subordinating history to the service of
right-wing patriotism. The working class was to have a central role in this change,
and it would become a dominant force. Even progressive bourgeois circles would
be invited to participate in the battle. Palmgren’s speech also featured a strong call
for internationalism. Palmgren argued that the time had come to join the two great
progressive cultures: the United States and the Soviet Union. During the immediate
post-war years, leftist circles viewed these nations as the saviors of democracy, the
conquerors of Nazi Germany. The Cold War had not yet begun, and anti-American
attitudes were still non-existent (Liikanen 1998; Turunen 2003, 272).

Palmgren charged himself with introducing the newest world literature to the
readers of leftist newspapers and cultural magazines. He also exerted some influ-
ence on what kind of world literature was to be printed during the post-war years
because, immediately after the war, he became the first director of the publishing
house Kansankulttuuri (People’s Culture). Its policy was to create cultural ties with
countries that until then had been almost completely ignored by Finnish publishers
and to publish literature from these countries. Kansankulttuuri began to translate
and publish, in particular, modern Soviet literature and clearly leftist or socially
radical works of world literature (Turunen 2003, 205).

Palmgren was also the key person in the government committee on book pub-
ishing set up in 1946. This committee had a leftist majority, even though large
bourgeois publishing houses were also represented. “Palmgren’s committee” stated
that Finnish publishing policy had neglected literature that featured the worldview
of the working class. Moreover, it had ignored contemporary Finnish social literature as well as modern world literature. Instead, for the sake of profit, lightweight reading had been published extensively (Turunen 2003, 210–11).

Times had indeed changed. After the war, the Social Democratic movement established the publishing house Tammi, which concentrated on translations. Its motives were not exclusively ideological because, as a newcomer in the field, it faced some difficulty in seizing a large enough domestic-market share. However, it was not difficult to acquire translation rights for foreign books. The Finnish book market experienced an influx of international literature many times greater than in the pre-war years. Complete works were translated from the same authors such as André Malraux and Edgar Lee Masters, whose texts were available only as excerpts in the 1930s (Turunen 2003, 204).

Authors’ Responsibility for Their Era: Jean Paul Sartre

One of the debates close to the hearts of left-wing intellectuals regarded the social mission of the author. The impact of this debate was far-reaching, including within the Union of Finnish Writers. Left-wing intellectuals demanded that artists assume political responsibility. However, opponents interpreted this position as a push toward politicizing art. It was resisted by the young generation of contemporary writers that supported the autonomy of literature, and it was opposed as well by the preceding generation of authors that embraced patriotism.

Risto Turunen has studied power struggles within Finnish literature in the 1940s and 1950s. On the basis of these debates, he has identified five different ways to conceive of the author’s position and mission: (1) the author as a great national figure (national-romantic view); (2) an independent artistic genius (romantic view); (3) a clerk of the nation (functional view); (4) an emancipatory writer (avant-garde view); and (5) a craftsman with words (modernist view). According to Turunen, authors among left-wing intellectuals and the Kiila group emphasized the connection between literature and daily life. They saw themselves as people who could both see and understand social development. These characteristics are associated with the conception of an author’s role as emancipatory (Turunen 2003, 188–89).

Attempts to define the role of the author were started by editor-in-chief Jarno Pennanen in the first issue of 40-luku in 1945. He emphasized that authors’ relationship to their era is always a political matter and nobody can avoid it. Every act has political consequences. According to Pennanen, an author belonged among the builders of the future—“he has a molder’s hands” (1945, 2). Pennanen wondered if
anyone could possibly fail to understand the political nature of literature during an era marked by war and by compulsory military and labor service. He wrote poetically: “If an artist plays down his own political identity, he gives up his individuality and is exposed to political propaganda. The artist’s relationship with the world is an erotic one, warm and fertile. For artists it is not irrelevant what happens to his people and country, other peoples and the mankind. It is a matter of heart, his great love” (Pennanen 1945, 2).

The perceptions of left-wing intellectuals about the political nature of art were buttressed when Raoul Palmgren—the first Finn to do so—met the French philosopher and author Jean Paul Sartre in Stockholm in the summer of 1945 and again in Helsinki in the fall of 1946. Sartre was attending performances of his plays. Palmgren published three articles about him in 40-luku. He was attracted by Sartre’s existentialist vision that a man is the product of his own making. What is more, Sartre’s participation in the French Resistance, with his play Les Mouches (The Flies), evoked Palmgren’s interest and approval. Also of considerable weight were Sartre’s leftist sympathies, notwithstanding the fact that he was not a Communist. Palmgren revered Sartre’s stand concerning the relationship of the author with his era. According to Sartre, the author’s obligation is to live in his time and to pass away with it. There is no need to strive for immortality in the judgments of generations to come. Sartre disputed the value of literature that detached itself from reality and focused on aesthetic values. This is how Palmgren addressed Sartre’s message to the readership of 40-luku:

There may be epochs more beautiful, but this is ours; we can live only in this life, in this war, maybe in this revolution. We are sure that we cannot step aside. [. . .] An author is placed into his own era: an echo will respond to everything he says—and it responds also to our silence. [. . .] The occupation years have taught us our responsibility. (R. Palmgren 1945a, 572)

Many French leftist authors were involved in the underground resistance movement during the war, and Finnish left-wing intellectuals revered them for that. 40-luku published an extensive and appreciative treatise about them by an Estonian, I. H. Orras, who introduced Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon, Pierre Emmanuel (Noël Jean Mathieu), Jean Casson, and Loys Masson. Orras depicted them as poets of the underground resistance, patriotic heroes, and defenders of the free world, noting
that many of them had now joined the French Communist Party, as had the cream of the French intelligentsia generally (Orras 1946). French literature, with André Malraux as its most prominent representative, was also allocated ample space in the magazine. As during the preceding decade, radical French culture was an important point of orientation for Finnish left-wing intellectuals (see also Collier 1988b, 147–58; Raymond 1988).

THE NEW EPOCH: MOSCOW—the GIANT LIGHTHOUSE

Of the two superpowers, the Soviet Union was closer to left-wing intellectuals. It was seen as an optimistic signpost to the future as concerned the prospects of socialism. At the end of 1944, Palmgren wrote: “From the giant Moscow lighthouse beam the rays of hope [. . .]. These blessed 1940s carry in their womb the new world. The great ideas of freedom, dreams of social justice and brotherhood of the mankind will again become flesh” (1944, 10). Finnish left-wing intellectuals resembled their European colleagues, many of whom revered the Soviet Union as the country of the future (see also Rinne 2006, 135; Hollander 1981; Furet 1999).

However, the majority of the Finnish people thought exactly the opposite. True to the ideas of the pre-war years, they feared and mistrusted the Soviet Union. Left-wing intellectuals, on the other hand, saw the future in the Soviet Union and wanted to become familiar with its culture and its society.

Various elements of Soviet culture became accessible in Finland soon after the war. The Red Army Choir performed, and Soviet artists paid goodwill visits that were organized by the Finland—Soviet Union Association. The magazine 40-luku published an article by a renowned cultural liberal Olavi Paavolainen about Russian folk dance art, while a Communist Party member of the parliament, Mauri Ryömä, wrote about his theater visit to Moscow. Palmgren lectured on the radio and, in his capacity as editor-in-chief of the newspaper Vapaa Sana, wrote about his experiences of the Soviet Union, praising what he had seen—kolkhozes, factories, and the Soviet citizen.

Information from the Soviet Union circulated, depicting the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra, social realism in literature, poets (Mayakovski and Yesenin), composers (Shostakovich and Scriabin), and filmmakers (Pudovkin and Eisenstein). Palmgren wrote about the historical motifs of Soviet films. Book advertisements enticed readers to buy translations of novels: Maksim Gorky, Mikhail Sholokhov, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Nikolai Ostrovsky, Konstantin Simonov, Leonid
Devotedly International—But Always Wrong

Leonov, Aleksander Tshakovsky, Fyodor Gladkov, Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Turgenev, Anton Chekov, and A. Fadeyev. The biographies of Lenin and Stalin were translated.

Palmgren introduced to the readers of 40-luku three translated Soviet-Russian works, which, in his opinion, were the most significant. These were Mat’ (Mother) and V lyudyakh (My Childhood), by Maxim Gorky, and Tikhiy Don (Quiet Flows the Don), by Mikhail Sholokhov. Among Russian authors, Gorky stood as the most significant to the left-wing intellectuals—a pillar-saint—as they said with some self-irony; they identified themselves in the intellectually minded protagonist of Gorky’s Zhizn’ Klima Samgina (The Life of Klim Samgin). Gorky’s Mat’, in Palmgren’s words, was “a classic portrayal of the Russian workers’ movement” (R. Palmgren 1945b, 183). Palmgren went on to say that some regarded the novel more as propaganda than art but “be that as it may—it had immortalized on its pages the suffering and heroic battle of the Russian proletariat” (R. Palmgren 1945b, 183). In the figure of the mother, Gorky had incarnated, Palmgren held, all that is immortal in a working woman: “fighter, martyr, mother of revolution” (R. Palmgren 1945b, 183).

Excitement, and Disappointment, about American Cultural Life

During the same years that Palmgren paid tribute to Soviet literature, he lauded with intensity—and at greater length—American prose and its creators. Palmgren’s texts indicate a genuine interest in novels that depict American society. He wrote extensively in 40-luku about Jack London, Theodor Dreiser, and John Steinbeck. All these authors had been respected by left-wing intellectuals during the pre-war years, and they stepped again into the spotlight.

When Kansankulttuuri published the translation Merimies hevosen selässä (Sailor on a Horseback (1946), Irving Stone’s biography of Jack London, Palmgren regarded it as a cultural event. He stated that in London’s person appeared typical American characteristics, including an absence of prejudice, dynamism and optimism, and, too, superficiality and naivety. For Palmgren, the approach in the biography was incredibly intimate. He cited as well the magazine New Masses, which had raised London to the status of a leading proletarian author in the United States. According to Palmgren, London’s books were read by all those who belonged to the working class; he was the most down-to-earth author of the American working class (R. Palmgren 1946a). London became popular in Finland as well. In particular his autobiographical novel Martin Eden impressed young left-wing intellectuals and the contemporary working-class readership.
Palmgren wrote critical essays on Dreiser and Steinbeck and analyzed them particularly as social narrators. After Dreiser’s death in 1945, Palmgren appraised his naturalist but nevertheless down-to-earth authorial personality. Palmgren went on to define him as the first great portrayer of society in American literature, the creator of “epics of finance capitalism” whose novels *Financier* (1912) and *Titan* (1914) had penetrated to the heart of the Chicago business world at the end of the nineteenth century. He judged the novel *An American Tragedy* (1925) as the best of Dreiser’s works, regretting the fact that it had not been translated into Finnish (R. Palmgren 1946b).

*Grapes of Wrath*, by Steinbeck, made a profound impression on Palmgren. The Depression-era setting appears to have ignited Palmgren’s interest because the same years had been decisive for the development of his own worldview. He characterized the novel as an impressive prose epic with the author rising above the simple narration of episodes and “observing a magnificent social upheaval, the fate of hundreds of thousands of people and that of an entire class, seeing the events in the scale of states, economic systems of continents and historical epochs” (1945c, 158). However, the narrative does not resort to theory and abstraction, but “with his artist’s hands, the author shapes the fluid reality into true and shocking poetry” (1945c, 158).

In addition to Palmgren, many others reviewed American literature in 40-luku. Novels by Hemingway were the most frequent subject. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *To Have and Have Not*, and *A Farewell to Arms* were received with appreciation. Novelists John dos Passos and Upton Sinclair, as well as poets Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, and Archibald MacLeish were positively reviewed. Kaisu-Mirjami Rydberg specialized in African American culture. She wrote about the world-famous novel *Native Son*, by Richard Wright, translated into Finnish in 1948 (Rydberg 1946b).

Among left-wing intellectuals, Rydberg was the one who most extensively familiarized herself with American society and culture. Her personal interest resulted in a travel book *Katselin Amerikkaa* (I Watched America) (1946a). Rydberg related how she loved the “progressive” side of the United States: the literati, the journalists, and the artists, as well as the ordinary people, the working men and labor activists she had met. However, she shunned the commercialism of the country, its businessmen, its racial zealots, and its anti-communists. Her trip, which extended over two months, was also personally important to her because in Kaisu-Mirjami’s early childhood her father, Waino Riippa, had left for Astoria, Oregon, to work as the editor of an immigrant newspaper *Toveri* (The Comrade). Rydberg visited
Astoria and was moved by the warm welcome there. Old immigrants told her how she looked like her father, who had been a decent man (Rydberg 1946a, 273–74).

Immigrants had been building a bridge between Finland and the United States for generations. Before the Second World War, Finnish labor activists had counted the United States as among the leading countries for the workers’ movement. Left-wing intellectuals felt a sense of solidarity with the radical side of the United States. However, with the alarming, post-war news of persecution of communists, such interest soon died out. Left-wing intellectuals talked about a cultural crisis and feared an outbreak of a Third World War.

Kaisu-Mirjami Rydberg, editor-in-chief of 40-luku, published an extensive story about the persecution of communists in the United States. The magazine also published a speech given by the actress Katherine Hepburn to her colleagues in Los Angeles, where they had discussed the way liberal artists, authors, and journalists were treated. Hepburn declared her moral indignation against the measures of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. The story reported how actors and actresses renowned even in Finland were under suspicion and ended up on a blacklist (Rydberg 1947a).

With the advancing Cold War, left-wing intellectuals began to view the United States more critically and the Soviet Union more positively. The turn is particularly visible in the writings of Kaisu-Mirjami Rydberg. Whenever she had a chance to compare the United States with the Soviet Union, her verdict fell in favor of the latter.

**Condemnation by the Liberals and the Communist Party**

Finnish left-wing intellectuals were also interested in liberal bourgeois cultural circles in all countries and wanted to establish contacts with them. It was paramount to involve a large number of people, to recreate even in Finland the pre-war “popular front.” However, their ideas suited neither the Finnish liberal educated class nor the orthodox functionaries of the Finnish Communist Party. The former regarded the plans of the left-wing intellectuals as questionably leftist. The latter could not conceive of anything else as feasible except the art created in the Soviet Union, impregnated with social realism. To their detriment, the left-wing intellectuals were not impressed by that view of art.

The Communist Party condemned the United States and Americanism on all fronts. Bourgeois intellectuals such as Jean Paul Sartre were also suspected. The fact that Sartre was admired by Raoul Palmgren, among many others, increased
Palmgren’s already considerable unreliability in the eyes of the Party leaders. It was difficult for functionaries with a working-class background to live with the fact that many left-wing intellectuals came from bourgeois families. The left-wing intellectuals were reproached for their lack of dogmatic education in Marxism-Leninism as given by the Moscow Party School. Left-wing intellectuals had drawn their worldview from the heritage and present state of Western culture and came to Marxism through theorists of the German Social Democratic movement. The ingredients for the rift thus existed, and disputes between the Party functionaries and left-wing intellectuals began. Palmgren was the first to be in the spotlight. Unprompted, in 1952 he gave back his membership card and was formally dismissed by the Party and fired from the editorship of the newspaper *Vapaa Sana*. The Party cited his excessive independence as the editor-in-chief and his ideological teetering as cause (Koivisto 2011, 330–31).

In 1956, the Kiila group adopted a positive attitude towards the popular uprising in Hungary. This irritated the Communist Party, which demanded a unanimous condemnation of the revolt. Members of the Kiila group became increasingly disillusioned with the Party. Many of them separated, leaving political life and engaging themselves in culture.

Even the publishing policy of the Party-owned publishing house Kansankulttuuri became stricter. From the end of the 1940s, international novels and poetry gradually gave way to materials better suited for Party activists, while the Social Democratic publishing house Tammi continued to produce translations of international literature in a much-appreciated book series *Keltainen kirjasto* (Yellow library), which is still going strong.

**The Aftermath of the 1940s**

The post-war peak period of left-wing intellectuals’ internationalization spanned only a couple of years. The 1950s entailed new challenges. The extreme Left was no longer as attractive to voters as immediately after the war. As for politically active left-wing intellectuals, they had a day of reckoning with their convictions and ethics after Khrushchev revealed the atrocities conducted by Joseph Stalin. Many were ashamed of their uncritical admiration of Stalin.

What did the spirited but short-lived post-war period of internationalization mean for working-class culture and literature? First, *40-luku* and other leftist publishers opened a whole new epoch in Finnish publishing. When reading the texts, one gets a feeling that long-standing dams were demolished and the authors had a
lot to say. Second, the period also featured a lively publishing of texts by left-wing intellectuals themselves. The Kiila group produced 117 items between 1944 and 1951, in a variety of genres: realistic novels and short stories, political poems, prison memoirs, allegoric fairy tales, and autobiographical texts. Thanks to the publishing houses established by the labor movement, leftist authors could publish more easily.

Additionally, many bourgeois publishers accepted leftist authors as they had done to some extent before the war. Many left-wing intellectuals wrote manuscripts during their captivity. The poets Arvo Turtiainen, Jarno Pennanen, Elvi Sinervo, and Kaisu-Mirjami Rydberg published their collections. Sinervo published prose and a fairy tale play. Turtiainen published his prison diary. Cay Sundström wrote a biography of Victor Hugo, *Romantikens revolt* (Revolt of Romanticism) (1946). Raoul Palmgren published his essays on the cultural evolution of the Finnish nation under the title *Suuri linja: Kansallisia tutkielmia* (The great line: National studies). These works have generally been evaluated as among the best by their authors (Rinne 2006, 177–79).

An important question is whether or not left-wing intellectuals influenced readers and authors with real working-class backgrounds. An ideal of the cultured worker was, indeed, in the air. In 1947, Sylvi-Kyllikki Kilpi, a member of parliament who represented the Finnish People’s Democratic League (and a sister of Elvi Sinervo), highlighted the existence of educated workers who possessed extensive knowledge. Many of them had a background of rich independent reading, organizational activities, and participation in study groups. Kilpi referred to the presence of such characters in the novels by the working-class author Toivo Pekkanen. In her critique, she considered educated members of the working class to be “working-class aristocracy” (Kilpi 1947). It is likely that encouraging people like them to extend their education was the purpose of at least some leaders of the labor movement.

Workers, however, did not show too much interest in the cultural program of left-wing intellectuals. Because it was regarded as elitist and difficult to understand, *40-luku* was not popular reading. Circulation remained low and the magazine collapsed because of poor finances. Cultural activism was no longer needed as a cover for political actions in the way it had been before the war. The organizations and parties of the extreme Left had been legalized, and their working-class members could function as they pleased. Working-class members showed scant interest in the cultural writings published in the magazine of the Finland—Soviet Union Association. For the majority of workers, culture simply sank to the level of other less important matters. Even working-class authors were hesitant to follow the
routes outlined by left-wing intellectuals. A good example is Väinö Linna, whose writing ideals were completely different and who became the nation’s most beloved and widely read author after the war.

The left-wing intellectuals themselves thought, however, that the “battles” of their youth were significant for all of Finnish culture. They were keen on writing memoirs. In 1953, Raoul Palmgren published the important novel 30-luvun kuvat on the basis of his own interpretation of the events of the 1930s. Jarno Pennanen’s memoirs Tervetuloa, tervemenoa: Jarnon saaga 1–2 (Welcome, farewell: Jarno’s saga 1–2) was published posthumously in 1970. Friends wrote a tribute Elämää ja ystäviä (Life and friends) to Arvo Turtiainen in 1980. In their memories, the past was often depicted with a golden glow. They emphasized a strong sense of solidarity, although even darker shades can be distinguished. These works by left-wing intellectuals uniformly describe how the years of passionate action in the 1930s and 1940s ended in disappointment. They did not gain the influence on cultural policy for which they had yearned. Admittedly, they were successful as poets, authors, and journalists.

However, with the rise of leftist student radicalism in the 1960s, they—Raoul Palmgren, Elvi Sinervo, and Arvo Turtiainen—were brought back into the spotlight. Their writings were reprinted, and they were invited to appear in public. They headed protest processions. Recognition thus came from the next generation when it adopted as its idols the left-wing intellectuals who had led their own dramatic youthful lives in the 1930s. It was understood that archives had the last chance to collect the experiences of left-wing intellectuals, who already were facing the evening of their lives (Koivisto 2011, 335). These intellectuals were interviewed for television and radio by the Finnish Broadcasting Company. Many left-wing intellectuals donated their personal papers to the People’s Archives, with an understanding that their lives and times would one day be a topic for scientific study. These documents are now frequently used by researchers. As research drawing extensively on oral history has underscored (Fingerroos et al. 2006), the significance of people’s actions does not perish in their own time. On the contrary, it can move in to motivate the actions of the subsequent generations, as a result of active remembering and reinterpretation.

REFERENCES


Liikanen, Ilkka. 1998. “Kamppailu kansakunnan menneisyydestä: Raoul Palmgrenin Suuri linja kansakunnan synynyn tulkintana ja 1940-luvun poliitikan doku-

menttina” [Struggle of the past of the nation: “Great line” by Raoul Palmgren as an interpretation of the nation’s birth and a document of the politics in the 1940s.]. In 40-luku: Kirjoituksia kirjallisuudesta ja kulttuurista. [Writings about the literature and culture of the 1940s], edited by Auli Viikari. 49–69, Helsinki: SKS.


Recognizing Your Class:
Toivo Pekkanen, Raoul Palmgren, and Literature for the Working Class

Veli-Matti Pynttäri
University of Turku

Abstract
The rise of working-class literature in post-Civil War Finland was often accompanied by an increased critical interest in the notion of the working-class author. In this article, Toivo Pekkanen (1912–57), as one of the prime exponents of working-class literature in general, is contrasted with Raoul Palmgren’s theoretically comprehensive and ideologically and socially determined view of working-class literature and the proletarian author. The shifting dynamics involved in recognizing and representing proletarian identity were crucial in contesting the value of literature to society in the 1930s.

Questions of Proletarian Authorship in the 1930s
In December of 1936, Kirjallisuuslehti [Literary magazine], a leftist literary journal, published a short account of a meeting that had taken place earlier in the month, on December 4, in Helsinki. The account concerned a social evening organized by Vapaamielinen ylioppilasyhdistys (Liberal Student Association) and attended by members of Kiila (Wedge), a coalition of working-class authors that had been founded a year earlier (Sallamaa 1994, 54). The main topic of discussion was the notion of the working-class author in general, but attention soon focused on a dispute over representative examples of such authors. Among contemporary writers, who could be considered a “real” working-class writer? On what grounds could this be determined?

Such acute interest in the idea of the working-class author was understandable, as the author was considered an indispensable link in the relationship between
literature and society. In the early 1930s, the young Finnish critic Raoul Palmgren (1912–95) even proclaimed that it was morally suspicious not to employ politically the resources of authorship in times of great cultural and societal turmoil (Palmgren [1933] 1980, 15)—and these resources, Palmgren certainly knew how to employ. Beginning in the 1930s and continuing until the end of his career, Palmgren produced several tomes of research on Finnish working-class authors, which earned him indisputable authority on the subject. Recently, however, there has been a growing interest in reassessing Palmgren’s rather definitive view of the working-class author. For instance, in her dissertation on the Finnish playwright Elvira Willman, Elsi Hyttinen (2012, 49; see also this issue) emphasizes that identification as a working-class author should not be restricted only to those who belong to a certain social class but should rather be regarded as a discursive struggle for the opportunity to pass as a working-class author. Naturally, the notion of the working-class author is not withering away in current research on working-class literature—indeed, it might still retain the moral necessity it had for Palmgren in the 1930s.

The opposing views expressed in the spirited 1936 argument eventually centered on the question of whether or not it was reasonable to call Finnish author Toivo Pekkanen (1902–57) a proletarian author. Choosing Pekkanen as the point of contention was not entirely accidental. He was born into a working-class family in Kotka in southeast Finland, and by the age of twelve he was already working at the docks to compensate for the insufficiency of the family income that had resulted from his father’s sudden disability, which had rendered him unable to work (Ahti 1967, 14). From these rather poor conditions, Pekkanen rose to become a nationally recognized author, and he was eventually granted the honorary title of Academician in 1955.

By 1936, Pekkanen had already published three collections of short stories, three novels, one novella, and two plays. Among these early works was his renowned autobiographical novel *Tehtaan varjossa* (In the shadow of the factory), published in 1932. Choosing Pekkanen as a contested author was understandable as he had begun his literary career representing workers and the reality of the working class, but had since published works that had been seen as distancing himself from his earlier worldview. Not surprisingly then—especially as Pekkanen had deliberately distanced himself from politics and ideological struggles—the members of Kiila wrote in *Kirjallisuuslehti* that Pekkanen was not a proletarian writer because he did not depict the typical proletarian that every worker could recognize as himself, as his or her own image, but rather Pekkanen portrayed an individual withdrawing
Recognizing Your Class: Toivo Pekkanen, Raoul Palmgren, and Literature for the Working Class

from questions of (social) class into self-examination (for example, Samuel Oino, the protagonist of Tehtaan varjossa) (Kirjallisuuslehti 1936, 439).

In this article, I will examine the ambivalent status and future fate of Toivo Pekkanen as a proletarian author and as a particular instance of negotiating the nature and political relevance of working-class literature during the 1920s and 1930s. How did this controversy reflect political and ideological divisions within the labor movement? How did this struggle over the cultural policies of working-class literature prompt definitions of the proletarian author that centered, among other things, on the ideologically laden idea of “recognition”?

Literature from the Political Realities

After the Reds had suffered a devastating loss in the Civil War of 1918, working-class literature was marginalized for much of the interwar period. Proletarian authors remained relatively invisible in the public literary scene, which was increasingly controlled by the liberal bourgeois establishment. Although working-class literature was not explicitly censored or excluded from literary life, publishing companies complied with the political exigencies of the state and willingly echoed the ideological views of the bourgeois establishment. In other words, the publishers favored works that promoted the bourgeois nationalistic agenda while shying away from literature that strove to undermine those same political premises. It is evident that working-class authors faced insurmountable obstacles in defying the political orientation of many of the major publishers and in undoing the stigma that had branded the labor movement and the working class in general bourgeois opinion after 1918.

However, Toivo Pekkanen’s first two collections of short stories are a testimony to his publisher’s (Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö) willingness to more extensively publish working-class literature in the latter part of the 1920s. This shift towards the inclusion of working-class literature in the public domain did not occur in the hope of generating profit but rather reflected an attempt to integrate segments of the working class into the nationalistic system of values (Häggman 2001, 340). Ten years after the Civil War had drawn dividing lines through the Finnish populace, literature was (again) perceived as a vehicle for political nation-building. However, even in the early 1930s, the idea of societal integration through literature was attacked by the rise of right-wing populism, which had become a new prominent force in cultural and political life in Finland during the first years of the decade. Instead of class divisions diminishing, the idea of social and ideological class
divisions grew in strength in the aftermath of the Great Depression and with the subsequent rise of right-wing populism (Sevänen 1994, 159–60).

As working-class authors faced unsurprising exclusion from established mainstream publishers, they were simultaneously forced to come to terms with the erosion of the unified working-class movement that had existed at the beginning of the twentieth century. After the loss of the Civil War, the labor movement was politically divided into the reformist Social Democratic Party, which emphasized the parliamentary system, and the Socialist Labor Party that favored more radical political activism. The new political and cultural reality of the labor movement was based on divisions in party politics rather than on a unified and unifying experience of social class. Instead of being writers of the working class, proletarian authors were forced to take sides in the political division of the left and to align themselves either with the social democrats or the radical left. Only a few authors chose (or were able to) remain independent in the polarized political landscape (Roininen 1999, 240).

This political disintegration certainly had an effect on the development of working-class literature during the interwar period. On the one hand, working-class literature remained stagnant as regards formal innovations, as writers loyal to the Socialist Party tended to favor the stylistic techniques of the “old” labor movement, techniques that had recently gone out of fashion. On the other hand, working-class authors were abandoning the idea of collectivity, a notion that had been emblematic for pre-Civil War working-class literature, and they were now increasingly embracing the notion of the proletarian author as an individual writer. This gave rise to the notion of the “leftist author,” which was to replace older notions of working-class literature and the working-class author. In the 1920s and 1930s, it was authors who distanced themselves from the collective identity of working-class literature who, in particular, took proletarian literature towards new artistic achievements (Roininen 1999, 241).

The shift in the late 1920s from the assumed collective identity of the “proletarian” author to the increased individuality of the “leftist” author resulted as well in a shift in the practices of working-class literature as the authors themselves started to pay more attention to aesthetic ambitions. According to Aimo Roininen, it was the departure from the standards of the old working-class movement of the turn of the century and the growing interest in the autonomy of literary art that expedited the increased visibility of working-class literature in the Finnish literary scene (1999, 241). In the politically divided working-class movement, this development was partly regarded as a decline, and, consequently, leftist authors were viewed as
Recognizing Your Class: Toivo Pekkanen, Raoul Palmgren, and Literature for the Working Class

traitors of their own class. The dispute that followed was not primarily an aesthetic one; rather, it concerned the nature of the relationship between literature and society, especially as both terms were defined in terms of politics and ideology. The value of literature was determined either as a question of how accurately it depicted social realities or, in a more sophisticated manner, as a question of whether the workers, the members of the class, could recognize themselves in the literature. “Recognition” was a term that avoided the pitfalls of correspondence, but it was still securely moored in a relationship between literature and the social world.

Toivo Pekkanen: From Proletarian to Emerging Leftist Author

The early career of Toivo Pekkanen can be understood as an illustration of the conflicting demands between the Scylla of the pre-determined ideology of social class and the Charybdis of the aesthetic autonomy of literature that characterized the (re-)emerging working-class literature of the late 1920s and early 1930s. While working as a blacksmith, Pekkanen started to contribute regularly to the weekly literary journal Juttu-tupa (Chat house), which was published in his hometown, Kotka. Although the stories published in the journal earned Pekkanen a modest remuneration, the primary reason for writing and publishing the stories in Juttu-Tupa was his will to develop as a writer. The fact that the journal was widely read, particularly in working-class households in Kotka, was an additional motivation (Ahti 1967, 31).

Even though Pekkanen’s personal history can be read as the idealistic stereotype of a worker who, as an autodidact, reads abundantly, educates himself, and learns to express in literary form the social conditions of his class for his class, it is evident from these first forty-two short stories published in Juttu-Tupa that Pekkanen did not wish to restrict himself to ideologically determined proletarian topics. Many of the stories were based on autobiographical facts and displayed a constant introspection in their protagonists (not dissimilar from Pekkanen himself), though only a few of them can be considered as concerning themselves with social questions. However, the lack of “social” topics in these early stories can be explained as a form of self-censorship, for many of Pekkanen’s unpublished stories are far more aggressively proletarian in nature (Ahti 1967, 32–36).

In 1925, Toivo Pekkanen became acquainted with members of the literary group Tulenkantajat (Torch bearers), which was closely associated with Nuoren voiman liitto (League of the young vigor). As one of the central figures of the Tulenkantajat, Olavi Paavolainen had a particularly great influence on Pekkanen’s early prose. Both literary organizations promoted a view of national literature that
was internationally oriented towards Europe and that challenged the existing literary history for its agrarian backwardness and lack of modernist, metropolitan (literary) culture. The Tulenkantajat in particular strove to be recognized as the iconoclastic vanguard of the new generation of Finnish authors. Pekkanen did not wish to belong to the liberal-bourgeois atmosphere that characterized the Tulenkantajat of the 1920s, because he himself came from the geographical and political periphery. However, it is evident that his writing was influenced by the aesthetic ideals of Tulenkantajat and the concrete advice and help given to him regarding how to get his short stories published (Ahti 1967).

For Pekkanen, the contact with the Tulenkantajat represented a drastic expansion of his literary world, one that soon thereafter translated into the publication of his first collections of short stories. *Rautaiset kädet* (The iron hands) was published in 1927 and *Satama ja meri* (The harbor and the sea) two years later. In addition to his relentless desire to write, the beginning of Toivo Pekkanen’s literary career can be seen, on the one hand, as resulting from the influence of liberal-bourgeois literary trends, and, on the other, from the brief moment in the late 1920s when the major publishers lifted the ban on working-class literature.

Although the Tulenkantajat did not strive to abolish the roots Pekkanen had as a working-class author, the attitude of much leftist/socialist critique was that Pekkanen had potential as a working-class author but that he was straying too far from the ideals of the working class. One such critic, Sylvi-Kyllikki Kilpi, even depicted this as an enormous failure on the part of the working-class movement: how was it possible that a writer like Pekkanen was able to slip within the influence of bourgeois literary culture (Ahti 1967, 65–66)? Despite Kilpi’s rather utilitarian view, Pekkanen’s first two collections of essays were hailed in liberal critiques as representing the emergence of the new proletarian literature. However, Kilpi is correct to suggest that working-class thematics are rather sparse in both *Rautaiset kädet* and *Satama ja meri*. It can be claimed that only the first short stories in *Rautaiset kädet* actually depict the social reality of working-class life. From the outset, Pekkanen remained a contested figure in the literary culture of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

The major breakthrough for Pekkanen was the novel *Tehtaan varjossa* in 1932. Even at its initial reception, *Tehtaan varjossa* was widely regarded as a largely autobiographical account of Pekkanen’s personal life. The protagonist Samuel Oino—Pekkanen’s alter ego—witnesses his father’s death right after the father is released

---

1 The 1920s Tulenkantajat are easily mistaken with the journal *Tulenkantajat* that was published in the 1930s. The latter had an explicit proletarian tone.
from a prison camp in the summer following the Civil War. As he grows older, Samuel manages to secure a job in the local factory at the age of fifteen, and soon advances from factory floor-sweeper to the toolsmith’s apprentice. Eventually Samuel becomes the principal breadwinner in his family, which consists of his mother and two siblings. Manual labor alone fails to satisfy the young Samuel: he begins to socialize more frequently with two of his friends, and soon thereafter the three young men form a tight circle that enables them to navigate the challenges of adulthood, everything from liquor to girls.

The primary reason for their spending time together, however, is their mutual intellectual curiosity channelled toward the world of books. The boys read a lot, everything from science to the classics, and they discuss the books they have read in order to make sense of the world. Another intellectual influence in Samuel’s life is his cousin, Pekka Valve, an active member of the underground party, who often lectures Samuel on the social and economic realities that determine Valve’s political and ideological worldview. Samuel starts to think about his life in the terms given by Pekka Valve but is ultimately unable to relinquish his personal worldview and his ambitions for the collective ideal of the social revolution of the working class. At the end of the novel, Samuel turns down the conventional prospect of starting a family as he ends his long-term relationship and chooses to remain unmarried and to live with his mother. Content with his life, Samuel is depicted as working at the factory, reading and writing in the evening, and concluding that the star-lit sky is more relevant for him than all the social, historical, and economic factors that determine his existence.

As it follows the life of Samuel Oino from the age of fourteen into early manhood, Tehtaan varjossa is clearly a bildungsroman: Pekkanen traces the variable changes in Samuel’s character that are motivated by the changing circumstances in the protagonist’s life and psyche. As a novel that puts so much stress on the development of its protagonist, Tehtaan varjossa was and has ever since been read as a decidedly autobiographical novel. Contemporary criticism, and almost all the criticism thereafter, has interpreted the novel against the backdrop of Pekkanen’s own career and his rise from the factory floor to a life dedicated to books and writing. In addition, Samuel’s cousin Pekka Valve has been seen as the alter ego of Pekkanen’s good friend, the novelist August Ripatti, who had been sentenced to prison for political activism after the Civil War. As an autobiographical bildungsroman, Tehtaan varjossa facilitated the popular notion of proletarian literature as being a form of writing that depended on the close relationship between fiction and reality. The underlying idea
was, of course, that the author of an autobiographical novel was writing more or less truthfully about his or her own experiences and thus providing information about a certain way of seeing the world, and perhaps even betraying the author’s will or need to give expression to these experiences.

Either way, as an autobiographical novel Tehtaan varjossa tapped into an internationally popular trend in working-class literature. In Scandinavia, and especially in Sweden, working-class literature had broken the frontlines of literary culture earlier in the 1920s, but the highlight of this progress was a set of autobiographical bildungsromane published in the 1930s. In the early 1930s, authors such as Ivar Lo-Johansson (1901–90), Eyvind Johnson (1900–76), Jan Fridégård (1897–1968), Harry Martinson (1904–78), and Gustav Sandgren (1904–83) published novels that were aesthetically ambitious representations of their personal developments in literary life (Palmgren 1965, 64–67). Even though Pekkanen was probably well aware of the literary life of neighboring Sweden, the most influential model for him was still Jack London’s Martin Eden (Palmgren 1965, 83). Aside from Martin Eden, Pekkanen draws heavily on London’s short stories, which were especially influential for his writings in the late 1920s. In his first collections of short stories, Rautaiset kädet, this is evident to the extent that the short stories in the first part of the collection can be and have been described as permeated by a “Londonesque” spirit (Ahti 1967, 61): the main characters of “Tuhannen markan viikkopalkka” (A thousand-mark weekly wage), for example, are thoroughly Londonian in their work ethics, while “Kehän voimakkain” (The strongest in the ring) shows an enthusiasm for sports comparable to several of London’s stories. Keijo Ahti maintains that in Rautaiset kädet London’s influence exceeded the merely thematic influence of the earlier stories and reached a stylistic level. Furthermore, Pekkanen’s first novel encouraged critics to deem him “the Finnish Jack London.” The novel itself, Tientekijät (The pioneers), was not considered a success, and Ahti even speculates that, given the enthusiasm for London among Finnish authors and critics in general, Pekkanen’s epithet as Finland’s Jack London might have saved him from considerably harsher criticism. Pekkanen was seen as bringing, in London’s wake, new blood to the veins of a stale Finnish literary culture (Ahti 1967, 55–57, 93–94).

Up to Tientekijät, London’s influence on Pekkanen can be considered purely thematic, as Pekkanen favored representations of masculine work, sports, and manly culture in general, but Tehtaan varjossa emphasized the notion of writing a proletarian autobiography that did not necessarily follow the same cultural perspective. Certainly, this shift can be interpreted as reflecting the diminishing influence
London’s work had on Pekkanen (Ahti 1967, 82), but then, I believe, one overlooks the influence that Jack London’s *Martin Eden* had—as an autobiographical novel—on proletarian literature as it garnered acclaim throughout Scandinavia and Finland.\(^2\)

**Defining the Proletarian Author and Proletarian Literature**

The social evening organized by Vapaamielinen ylioppilasyhdistys (Liberal student association) in December 1936 was not the first occasion when Pekkanen’s role as a proletarian author was challenged. In 1935, Raoul Palmgren, a prominent leftist literary critic in the 1930s, published an extended critique of Pekkanen’s *Kauppiaiden lapset* (Children of the shopkeepers, 1934), his first novel after the success of *Tehtaan varjossa*. The novel marks a decisive shift in Pekkanen’s career as it veers away from the working class and towards the upper-middle class. Consequently, it will come as no surprise that, right from the outset, Palmgren focuses his attention on questioning Pekkanen’s past and future definition as a working-class author.

Palmgren begins by maintaining that Pekkanen is the most problematic author in contemporary Finnish literature, as regards working-class literature and criticism. On the one hand, there are Marxist critics who hail him as the new proletarian hero, while, on the other hand, some working-class readers would, according to Palmgren, readily deny his proletarian nature altogether. Palmgren takes this ambivalence as a signal of the need to address properly the question of Pekkanen’s societal significance and his standing in the class struggle. At the heart of this debate are the questions of whether Pekkanen *is* a working-class author and of whether he *belongs* to the Finnish working class or not. Before passing judgement, Palmgren nonetheless recognizes the need for establishing a clear set of criteria for the notion of working-class literature and of the working-class author in general. As Palmgren noted in 1935, proletarian literature is defined by three characteristics: (1) it must reflect a certain proletarian vitality; (2) it expresses a proletarian worldview; and (3) it has a proletarian sphere of influence. One overarching feature of all these characteristics is the ideological recognition of the indispensable progress of the working class in the overall class struggle ensuing throughout contemporary society. After establishing these criteria and insisting on their scientific nature, Palmgren proceeds to assess Pekkanen’s works and his status as a proletarian author. Palmgren admits that there can be no question of Pekkanen’s proletarian background and worldview. As Palmgren sees it, this inherent proletarian background translates quite

\(^2\) On the importance of the autobiographical novel for the development of proletarian authors, see Palmgren 1965, 96, 165.
self-evidently into a literary style that corresponds to Palmgren’s otherwise rather vague notion of proletarian vitality. For him, Pekkanen’s serious, unwavering, and placid style is born of the vitality of the proletariat as the new emerging class. In comparison, the bourgeoisie—as the old, recessive class—is no longer capable of producing such healthy, unforced, and unexaggerated art (Palmgren [1935] 1980, 55–56).

However, what Palmgren finds suspicious in Pekkanen is his ideological indeterminacy, epitomized in the characters of Samuel Oino in *Tehtaan varjossa* and Dr. Lehtinen, one of the main characters in *Kauppiaiden lapset*, who are both seen as deserting their native proletarian class. In the essay, Palmgren depicts both Samuel Oino and Lehtinen as gradually detaching themselves from their social class and assuming more individualistic concerns regarding human life. For them, the ideological constitution of social class (which lies at the heart of Palmgren’s notion of proletarian literature) is a hindrance to the development of their kind. In Palmgren’s view, this is not just an accidental privilege of the author. On the contrary, it betrays a division in the historical reality of the working-class movement: for him, the characters in these two novels by Pekkanen represent a generation of workers who lost faith in the necessity of the class struggle in the aftermath of the Civil War of 1918. In this sense, defining whether Pekkanen, among other writers, should be considered a working-class author at all is a task that has political and ideological implications for Palmgren’s understanding of the reality of social class and the exigencies of the class struggle that it entails for him.

Palmgren’s almost dogmatically Marxist approach to the relationship between proletarian literature and the proletarian author on the one hand and social class and the class struggle on the other should, perhaps, be considered as resulting from the zealous attitudes of a young convert. Palmgren had begun his career in the late 1920s as a passionate apologist for liberal humanist values that were being challenged by cultural intolerance and reactionary politics, especially during the first years of the decade. Growing up in an upper-middle class family and drawing in his early writing from classical educational principles, humanistic world literature, and bourgeois liberalism, Palmgren was impacted by Marxist theory as late as the early 1930s. The rise of fascism in Europe, the subsequent fall of the Weimar Republic, and the demise of the German workers’ movement led Palmgren to question the adequacy of his earlier culture liberalism and reformist social democracy and to embrace Marxist theories of class struggle. A few years later, in 1934, Palmgren was
Recognizing Your Class: Toivo Pekkanen, Raoul Palmgren, and Literature for the Working Class

confident enough in his vocation to represent his agenda on Marxist aesthetics and the class struggle.

Palmgren’s rather opinionated take on Pekkanen’s relevance for working-class culture should, perhaps, be read in light of his newly achieved certainty regarding Marxist analysis. In retrospect, he has referred to these years (1934–35) as his own “disorder” with Marxist theory and socialism by referring to a well-known pamphlet by Lenin (Liikanen and Manninen 1982, 8). Furthermore, the essay on Pekkanen as a proletarian author also marks Palmgren’s transition from Tulenkantajat—the more liberal journal—to Kirjallisuuslehti, which was considered as being more to the left. At the beginning of 1935, Palmgren had started contributing to Kirjallisuuslehti and that same year had managed to claim the position of leading literary critic at the journal.

Although much of the orthodoxy of the essay can be related to Palmgren’s own newly acquired zeal, the argument regarding the notion of the proletarian author should not, however, be discarded in similar fashion. On the contrary, Palmgren again takes up the problematics of proletarian authors and their relation to the social world in his dissertation Työläiskirjallisuus (Working-class literature) in 1965. Reminiscent of the essay written thirty years earlier, Palmgren condenses his theoretical and conceptual treatment to several criteria for working-class authors and literature, including the criteria of (1) native class and social standing; (2) proletarian worldview; (3) proletarian thematics; (4) social sphere of influence; and (5) the possible stylistic features characteristic to working-class literature.

In presenting these criteria, Palmgren stipulates that they are not all equally relevant. He claims that the nature of proletarian literature is determined to a great extent by the two first criteria: namely the social criterion (i.e., the social background of the author as a determining factor) and the ideological criterion (literature presenting a proletarian worldview). The rest of the criteria are secondary. In his own analyses, however, Palmgren does not conceal a conviction that, of the two primary criteria, the social one is axiomatic; without it, the notion of proletarian literature—and consequently also the proletarian author—is redundant. We can assume, therefore, that the job of the critic is above all to analyze the social criteria, and to demonstrate whether the secondary criteria can facilitate the critic’s understanding of proletarian literature and the proletarian author (Palmgren 1965, 97–98).

In her dissertation on the Finnish playwright Elvira Willman, Elsi Hyttinen points out that Palmgren’s notion of working-class literature rests on a decidedly
materialist view of language: the circumstances characteristic for the use of language are organically reflected in the language (Hyttinen 2012, 49). In the strictest sense, then, the biographical origins of the author come to determine the author’s possible inclusion under the banner of proletarian literature. Consequently, for example, Raoul Palmgren regards Elvira Willman, who was born and raised in a middle-class family, as a convert to proletarian literature and therefore destined to remain excluded from the ranks of proletarian authors. Not sharing Palmgren’s materialist notion of language, Hyttinen proceeds to demonstrate how Willman’s proletarian authorship was a result of complex institutional processes in the literary culture of the early twentieth century. Interestingly, however, the case of Toivo Pekkanen is opposite to that of Willman: his indisputable proletarian origins represented a problem for Palmgren, as he perceives Pekkanen as having abandoned the worldview suited for his proletarian background.

In Palmgren’s 1965 dissertation, Pekkanen receives a considerably more favorable assessment as a proletarian author than he did in 1935. His social background (born into a proletarian family, having to work hard for a living from a very early age, and witnessing working-class life first hand) is, after all, a perfect example of Palmgren’s axiomatic criterion of proletarian literature, and in this respect, Palmgren does accord Pekkanen the epithet of “proletarian author” (e.g., Palmgren 1965, 88; Palmgren 1984, 65), a deed that would have been a far-fetched concession in the 1935 essay. Nevertheless, Palmgren remains doubtful of Pekkanen’s relation to the ideological criterion of proletarian literature. Clearly, the notion of proletarian literature is not as closely related to Marxist theory and socialist ideology as Palmgren’s earlier essay indicated: where he had earlier insisted on the necessary and close relationship between progressive proletarian literature and the ideological imperative of the class struggle (Palmgren [1935] 1980, 56), he later approvingly presents Pekkanen as a proletarian author outside or on the edges of Marxist ideology (Palmgren 1965, 138). Palmgren identifies the ideology in the works of Pekkanen in the evident duality of his working-class characters.

Palmgren takes his example from Tehtaan varjossa, in which Samuel Oino and Pekka Valve (Samuel’s cousin) represent the generation of workers who have lost their belief in the revolution and have detached themselves from their class and from active membership in the radical Communist Party. In 1965, unlike in the essay contemporary with Pekkanen’s novels, Palmgren is able to set this ideological polarization within the historical and political context of the early 1930s when, for instance, the rise of right-wing reactionary politics was met in the working-class
movement with an increasingly felt need for self-scrutiny (Palmgren 1965, 151). Another effort to contextualize Pekkanen’s lack of a proper ideological stance comes in Part II of Kapinalliset kynät I-III (Rebellious pens, 1984) as Palmgren points out that even though Tehtaan varjossa, and particularly the character of Samuel Oino, could be read as a manifesto for breaking with class origins, it is important to bear in mind that almost no socialist critics at the time did so (Palmgren 1984, 51). On the contrary, Tehtaan varjossa was widely interpreted as a demonstration of the moral and intellectual superiority of working-class culture to the bourgeois culture ridden with recession and fascism (Palmgren 1984, 51–52).

All in all, Palmgren’s view of Pekkanen as a proletarian author is inherently problematic, as he repeatedly points out (e.g., Palmgren [1935] 1980, 55; 1984, 64). Whereas the 1935 essay tended towards the exclusion of Pekkanen from the scope of proletarian literature on the basis of his “ideological indeterminacy,” the 1965 dissertation and Kapinalliset kynät (1984), however, take a more tolerant stance. Rather than excluding Pekkanen from the canon of proletarian literature, Palmgren depicts his relationship with the working class as being one of constant undulation: at times he sees Pekkanen as drawing closer to the working class and presumably as simultaneously becoming ideologically “less undetermined” (Palmgren 1965, 231; 1984, 66). At other times, according to Palmgren, Pekkanen is distancing himself in his works from the sociologically determined point of view, embracing new artistic currents, and experimenting with new forms of prose writing (ibid.). Despite the often vague and even contradictory rhythm of this undulation, Palmgren ultimately considers Pekkanen indispensible in portraying the life and reality of the working class in interwar Finnish history (Palmgren 1984, 66).

**Twofold Recognition**

What should we make then, as readers, of Toivo Pekkanen’s commitment or non-commitment to social class and ideology, and whether or not he “belongs” to working-class literature? Should we be concerned with how this belonging is reflected in or by his authorship? Does this really matter, as, for instance, notions of class and ideology have themselves been subject to considerable contention during the decades separating our act of reading Tehtaan varjossa and Pekkanen’s act of writing it? One appropriate way of dealing with these questions is to focus on the context of Pekkanen’s works, notably Tehtaan varjossa. What matters in reading the novel is, in other words, a proper understanding of the historical, societal, political, and ideological surroundings and circumstances of the 1920s and 1930s in Finland.
Palmgren’s difficult, career-long relationship with Pekkanen, as briefly elaborated in this article, is an illustrative case of such a contextualized reading. Palmgren’s contemporary reaction to the question of Pekkanen’s status as a proletarian author signals a deeply partisan and ideologically determined understanding of Finnish society and its future. Palmgren’s commitment to class struggle as a historical necessity, and his consequential rejection of Pekkanen as a proletarian author, is a powerful demonstration of just what controversial, contested, and sensitive ground the newly re-emerging working-class movement faced as its internal condition. On the other hand, Palmgren’s retrospective readings of Pekkanen, while still deeming him problematic, seek to include him in the tradition of proletarian literature as an essential part of the history of working-class culture, understood as forming a counterforce to reactionary bourgeois culture as it drew closer to the fascism of the early 1930s. Both of these contextualized readings are still relevant, though they result in rather different views of Pekkanen: on the one hand, Pekkanen is understood as having betrayed the cause; on the other hand, he is seen as the champion of progressive proletarian culture.

Palmgren’s readings are surely not the only ways of situating Pekkanen’s works in their historical context, and Palmgren is certainly not the only authority on Pekkanen. However, his readings do tend towards a certain historical contextualism, assigning meaning to texts solely by establishing their proper historical, social, or political context. In her recent article “Context stinks!” Rita Felski argues that this kind of historical contextualism is implicitly enforcing a “suspicious” reading that has been a paramount factor in contemporary criticism (Felski 2011a, 574; also Felski 2011b). Suspicious reading, and the explicative power of historical context as its corollary, presents an implicit view that literary texts are unable to fully fathom the circumstances vital in shaping and sustaining them; the critic’s “vigilant gaze” is responsible for “exposing the text’s complicity in social conditions that it seeks to deny or disavow,” as the context “will invariably triumph the claims of individual text, knowing it far better than it can ever know itself” (Felski 2011a, 574). Against such an understanding of texts, Felski argues for a mode of critique—post-critical or reflective reading (e.g., Felski 2009, 34)—that strives to account more thoroughly for “the transtemporal movement and affective resonance of particular texts” (Felski 2011a, 574). In other words, Felski is driven by the question of why we read certain texts and why they seem to have an intellectual and emotional impact on us in a way that is irreducible to the historical context of those very texts.
Furthermore, Felski emphasizes the need to consider texts as Latourian “nonhuman actors” and, consequently, to redefine our views regarding agency (ibid.).

What effect does Felski’s proposed reading have on the questions addressing the relationship between Toivo Pekkanen’s works, especially Tehtaan varjossa, and the notion of proletarian literature as defined, for example, by Palmgren? First, it would appear that the major dilemma of Pekkanen’s contemporaries, to wit, as to whether he could really be numbered among the Finnish proletarian authors of the first decades of the twentieth century, is not considered primary, as it is so deeply embedded in a historical/ideological understanding of the category. Certainly this question has considerable bearing on, for instance, the historical formation of working-class literature and proletarian authorship in Finnish interwar culture, but what becomes challenged is whether, in this case, Tehtaan varjossa should be treated solely as a function of this view. Second, in relation to the shifting idea of the work’s agency and transtemporal resonance, one is inclined to view Pekkanen’s works less as a repository and conveyer of the notion of proletarian literature, and more in terms of rethinking the notion of the working class as part of our own experience. How can Tehtaan varjossa possibly have an effect on readers today, and especially on their/our understanding of the novel’s contemporary society and its conditions, which were once debated under the rubric of the working class and the class struggle?

In her widely read Uses of Literature (2008), Felski argues for categories epitomizing a form of textual engagement that challenges the dominant form of critical/skeptical readings and points toward readings that underline “emphatic experience” with the text and “rough out,” as she puts it, a form of positive aesthetics. The categories that Felski introduces include recognition, enchantment, knowledge, and shock. Felski posits that these categories are “neither intrinsic literary properties nor independent psychological states, but denote multi-leveled interactions between texts and readers that are irreducible to their separate parts.” She also points out that these categories are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive—on the contrary, they are often intertwined and interfused, a fact that underlines the necessity of relinquishing the idea of achieving one master concept capable of settling once and for all the matter of the aesthetic relationship between text and reader (2008, 14–15, 22).

In the case of Toivo Pekkanen, and especially in relation to Tehtaan varjossa, the category of recognition provides a wide-ranging starting point for a brief exploration of the effects the novel might have in contemporary readings today. To a great extent, the difficulties regarding the novel’s ideological indeterminacy and its general acceptability within a proletarian literature hinged on who was
seen as recognizing the worker that Pekkanen depicted in the character of Samuel Oino. Interestingly enough, this recognition can be seen as extending in several directions in the political and ideological landscape of the 1930s. On the one hand, Pekkanen was criticized by the proletarian literary group Kiila for not providing any object of identification for the typical worker; in their opinion the “typical workers” will not find any way of recognizing themselves in the representation of the worker Pekkanen provides in his novel. On the other hand, Pekkanen was seen as granting too much leeway for that recognition; in his essay on Pekkanen, Raoul Palmgren understands this ideological indeterminacy as resulting from the fact that the bourgeois could also identify with and eventually appropriate Pekkanen’s worker, who was opposed to the reality of class struggle (Palmgren [1935] 1980, 56). In Palmgren’s own terms, one could maintain that the “sphere of influence,” one of the criteria of proletarian literature that Palmgren later presented, was in Pekkanen’s case politically tilted towards the wrong socio-economic group. In both instances the notion of recognition is closely aligned with at least the possibility of misrecognition: in the first instance, recognition fails to take place at all, and in the second, the recognition of the worker is essentially a political appropriation.

In *Uses of Literature*, Felski points out that the notion of recognition can easily be reduced to an understanding of the concept that is currently hailed as the “keyword of our time” in the field of political theory by, for example, Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth. According to Felski, political theory usually understands recognition in terms of acknowledgment: “the claim for recognition is a claim for acceptance, dignity and inclusion in public life.” Consequently, in recent societal dynamics, recognition is understood as being a correlate to, for example, feminism, gay and lesbian activism, and aspirations towards self-determination expressed by racial and ethnic minorities that all demand public acknowledgement. More anthropologically determined theories maintain that the demands of various social movements are not a prerequisite in defining recognition. For such theories recognition is rather an anthropological constant of becoming a person within a society (Felski 2008, 29).

One can see easily enough how the controversy over the nature of “proper” proletarian literature and proletarian authors in the 1930s can be viewed as just such a bid for acknowledgement and a claim to public and political life. Providing a definition for how to recognize a proletarian author is simultaneously a claim regarding the nature of the working class and an acknowledgement of the right to represent it in an ideologically and politically predetermined way: by challenging Pekkanen’s ability to represent a recognizable and identifiable worker, his viability
Recognizing Your Class: Toivo Pekkanen, Raoul Palmgren, and Literature for the Working Class

as an instrument in gaining acknowledgement for a politically and ideologically determined class-struggle is denied.

In arguing for a critical approach that seeks to undermine the prevalence of the ideological or “suspicious” reading, Felski maintains that, in contrast to political theory, the notion of recognition refers in literary studies to something more resembling “a cognitive insight, a moment of knowing or knowing again.” Consequently, “the ideas at play here have to do with comprehension, insight, and self-understanding [. . . ]. Recognition in reading revolves around a moment of personal illumination and heightened self-understanding.” When these two ways of understanding the notion of recognition are set against each other, it seems that they are distinct in that recognition in reading is directed toward the self while recognition in politics is directed at others (2008, 29–30).

Interestingly, both ways of understanding the notion of recognition are present in the ways in which Pekkanen’s works, particularly *Tehtaan varjossa*, have been read. On the one hand, Pekkanen has been read as the author who was essential in bridging the gap between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the 1920s and 1930s, thus earning acknowledgement from a working-class movement that was largely marginalized during the years following the Civil War. On the other hand, *Tehtaan varjossa* in particular has been read in a way that, in my view, epitomizes what Felski aims toward in redefining the notion of recognition for a “postcritical” or “reflective” reading. I will take an example from the highest levels of the Finnish political establishment. In a seminar organized for the centennial of the birth of Toivo Pekkanen, the then-prime minister of Finland, Paavo Lipponen, gave a keynote speech in which he explained how he was, as a schoolboy, given an assignment to prepare a presentation about *Tehtaan varjossa*. In a collection of essays published later, Lipponen writes that he remembers from that assignment and from reading the novel a strong feeling of identification with Toivo Pekkanen’s alter ego Samuel Oino; even though they came from different backgrounds, Lipponen could identify with, for instance, Oino’s obsessive reading habits, the claustrophobic feeling of the small town, breaking out into wider circles, and a certain sense of existential alienation (Lipponen 2003, 107–8). Not only is Paavo Lipponen the embodiment of Raoul Palmgren’s worst fears of 1935, namely that the middle-class identify with and appropriate Pekkanen—after all, Lipponen is from a middle-class family—but he also links his own take on *Tehtaan varjossa* to the wider development of the working-class movement in Finnish history from the early twentieth century to the twenty-first century. Of course, it is not surprising that Lipponen would be enthusiastic
toward Pekkanen, as he is one of the longest-serving chairmen of the Finnish Social Democratic Party, but nevertheless his reading of *Tehtaan varjossa* reveals the interdependence between recognition in reading (cognitive insight, a moment of knowing or knowing again oneself) and recognition in politics, the demand for public acceptance and validation.

The above duality in the notion of recognition is one instance of Felski’s (2011a, 576) ambition to outline a mode of textual engagement that strives to do justice to both a text’s singularity and its worldliness. In this regard, Toivo Pekkanen’s *Tehtaan varjossa*, and particularly the different readings to which it has been subjected in terms of politics, ideology, or literary achievements, is an exceptional case both in Finnish literary history and in the history of the working-class movement in negotiating the relationship between literary forms and their possible larger political effects.

**References**


Recognizing Your Class: Toivo Pekkanen, Raoul Palmgren, and Literature for the Working Class


Pekkanen, Toivo. 1932. Tehtaan varjossa [In the shadow of the factory]. Helsinki: WSOY.


“I HAVE HAD A FEELING THAT AUTHORS TAKE THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TOO LIGHTLY”:
ELVI SINERVO AS A WORKING-CLASS AUTHOR

Jaana Torninoja-Latola
University of Turku

ABSTRACT
Elvi Sinervo (1912–86) was a Finnish working-class author who became prominent during the 1930s. At first, her texts were published in newspapers of the labor movement, but then her first book was released in 1937 by the publishing house Gummerus, and her career lasted until the end of the 1950s. Sinervo’s worldview was socialist, and she participated in the political activity of the labor movement. For her, and for the whole group of Finnish left-wing intellectuals to which she belonged, literature was a part of the struggle for the working class and for socialism, a necessary component of any work by an author who was supposed to be in the vanguard of this struggle. They declared themselves a new power in the field of Finnish literature and a counterforce to the dominant bourgeois literary institution. This article examines how Elvi Sinervo’s authorship took shape in this context and analyzes how different experiential, ideological, and social elements influenced it.

Class Hate

Holy is the hatred.
Which we absorbed with our toiling mother’s milk.

Love has extinguished
from her eyes
She could see only her children’s hunger
Her face petrified with suffering.
She knew only to worry about tomorrow.
Elvi Sinervo as a Working-Class Author

(...)
Let holy flame burn us!
It purifies.
The time to love
has not yet come.¹

The name of the above poem is “Luokkaviha” (Class hate), and it first appeared in Tuohus, a handwritten newspaper published by the Social Democratic Youth Society of Helsinki in 1932. The author was the twenty-year-old Elvi Sinervo (1912–86), and in the poem she describes how suffering and poverty cause hatred towards those who are responsible for it. But this feeling is not merely negative because hatred can also produce a movement that aims to change the world into a better place for everyone. The poem describes the passionate ideological feelings of a twenty-year-old working-class girl, who has just joined the labor movement.

From this early poem, one can see that this young poet wanted, through her writing, to take a stand on social questions. She thought that literature must not be only a self-centered contemplation, but that it also had to perform a wider social role. In the old labor movement of early twentieth-century Finland, literature had already been used to some extent as an instrument of class struggle, to awaken the masses to the defects of society and the importance of that struggle. Echoes of the literature of the old labor movement can be heard in the rhetoric of Sinervo’s early poem. However, she represented a new generation in the field of working-class literature, the generation whose task would be to modernize the genre and tie it more tightly to the development of international literature. This generation managed to raise the quality of working-class literature, and it was capable of challenging the dominant conception of bourgeois literature in Finland (Roininen 1999, 241).

In this article, I consider Elvi Sinervo’s authorship and her conception of literature. For her, engaging in literary work was an inseparable part of her activities in the labor movement and of her socialist worldview. Step by step, her ideas about literature and her worldview became clearer and more conscious and helped her to position herself as an author. She felt that her duty was to write both for working-class people and about them, and in this way to participate in social discussion. Therefore, I examine elements that were relevant for her development as an author

¹ “Pyhä on viha./Jonka me imimme raatajäädin maidosta./ /Hänen silmistään/oli rakkaus sammunut:/Hän näki vain lastensa nälän/Hänen kasvoilleen oli kärsimys kivettynyt./Hän tiesi vain huomisen huolen. (...) Pyhä lieikki polttakoön! / Se puhdistaa./ Vielä ei ole tullut/ aika rakastaa.” (Sinervo 1932, translated by Viola Parente-Čapková)
and, more specifically, as a working-class author. I examine her private and public networks, their significance for her authorship, and her conception of literature. By examining these elements, it is possible to form a picture of how authorship takes shape in a network of literary, social, and ideological influences.

Furthermore, my article is based on new ways of understanding the concepts of biography and the author. A biographical method does not mean that I will search for the “original meaning” in Elvi Sinervo’s writings through her life, but place her in the field of Finnish literature as an active agent. The main purpose is to understand her motives, experiences, and values, and to connect her life and works to wider social contexts and networks and political and cultural practices (Berg, Florin, and Wisselgren 2011, 21–22). It is impossible to reach the life and personality of the person in its entirety, and it is always a matter of the interpretations of the researcher (Kurikka and Pynttäri 2006, 8; Burke 2006, 41; Hyttinen 2012, 28; Leskelä-Kärki 2006, 631–39).

**Cultured Working-Class Family and an Encouraging Husband**

The basis of Elvi Sinervo’s worldview was the ideological heritage of her family and also the influences of the Finnish Civil War in 1918 and its aftermath. Her father, Edvard Sinervo, a plate worker, was active in the labor movement in the early twentieth century; when the Civil War erupted in January 1918, he joined the Reds. After the war, he feared revenge by the Whites, and so he moved with his family from Helsinki to Ostrobothnia, where his mother still lived, and where the family spent the next seven years. At first, in the countryside, Edvard Sinervo made his dream come true and founded his own smithy. However, as it did not succeed economically, the family had to move to Vaasa. Edvard Sinervo died in 1926, and Elvi’s mother, Alma Sinervo, moved back to Helsinki with their two youngest daughters, Elvi and Aira.

Sinervo’s parents, especially her father, read a lot, and they believed that reading was useful and that literature could broaden people’s minds and ways of thinking. Elvi’s parents provided her with a model of a reading person, and almost all of their seven children followed that example. In the 1910s, this was not common in Finnish working-class families. Along with reading, the children started to write—diaries, short stories, and poems. For them, as for many other young people, one reason to keep a diary was to practice their writing, because they had big dreams of becoming “a real author.” To make those dreams come true, they summoned up their courage and sent their writings to different newspapers, hoping to get something
published. In the early 1930s, Työläisnuoriso (Working-class youth), published by the Social Democratic Working Class Youth Society of Finland, was the first paper that published poems written by Elvi Sinervo (Torninoja-Latola 2010, 127–29; Kalemaa 1989, 29).

It was not easy to be a novice writer in the Sinervo family because the sisters were the toughest of critics and they easily brought a dreamer down back to earth. When the older Elvi Sinervo later looked back at these years, she described the mentality of family thus: “If you did not feel that you are as good a writer as Shakespeare or at least Eino Leino, then there was no point in writing seriously” (Sinervo 1947, 476–77; all excerpts from Sinervo’s work in this article were translated by Jaana Torninoja-Latola). Throughout the whole of her career, Sinervo’s high expectations for her own work was evident in her disparaging relationship to her own writing. She rarely valued her texts, and I think that is one reason why she gave up her career as a writer at the end of the 1950s: she still thought that she was not good enough. From the Sinervo family, Elvi was not the only one who entered the public sphere. Her eldest sister, Sylvi-Kyllikki Kilpi, was a member of parliament for the Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue (Social Democratic Party of Finland, SDP) and the Suomen Kansan Demokraattinen Liitto (Finnish People’s Democratic League, SKDL), and she wrote many nonfiction books, mostly dealing with history. Her youngest sister, Aira Sinervo, was also an author and active agent in the field of the labor movement, especially on its cultural side.

Elvi Sinervo and two of her sisters were given the opportunity to attend high school, which was not very common among working-class children. In 1933, Elvi Sinervo passed her high-school examination and started university studies, although she never graduated. Education was a way into the new world both intellectually and socially, and it forced her to examine her own social status and worldview: who she was, where she belonged, and what her values were. Although the ideological atmosphere both in high school and in university was very right wing and patriotic, she still felt herself to be a working-class girl and wanted to continue the ideological tradition of the family; thus, she declared herself a socialist and became an active member of the labor movement. In her later years, Elvi Sinervo sometimes regretted not finishing her university studies, but at that time of her life, she was already in the middle of politics and writing, and there was no time to study.

Feminist studies of history have recently paid attention to the internal relations of married couples; they have tried to reach new ways of seeing categories such as private and public and agency and structure. One angle in these studies is to
examine the extent to which husband and wife influence each other (Berg, Florin, and Wisselgren 2011, 13–43). In my study of Elvi Sinervo’s authorship, it is therefore important to take into consideration the influence of her husband. In 1933, Elvi Sinervo married Mauri Ryömä (1911–58), who was a student in the Faculty of Medicine and came from a political middle-class family. His father was a member of parliament for the Social Democratic Party and a minister in two governments. Elvi Sinervo and Mauri Ryömä were both socialists, interested in similar political and cultural questions. They were members of the SDP, within which the most important organization for them was the Akateeminen Sosialistiseura [Academic Socialist Society, ASS]. Ryömä then became a leading figure for the opposition of the SDP before he was expelled from the party in 1937. Books were dear to both of them, and they talked a lot about their experiences with literature. Ryömä had a significant influence on his wife’s writing. He read her work, commented on the pieces, and provided new ideas for themes. When his wife felt insecure about herself as a writer, he encouraged her, and, whenever possible, he tried to give her an opportunity to write without financial worry.

**The Importance of Social Networks**

Despite doubting her own capabilities as an author, writing became Elvi Sinervo’s profession during the 1930s as she started to get her work published in different arenas. She sent her writings to different labor movement newspapers, the most significant of which were *Kirjallisuuslehti* (Literary magazine) and *Tulenkantajat* (Torch bearers). Both were leftist intelligentsia newspapers, and Elvi Sinervo became a part of this leftist group, which had a strong influence on her authorship. A literary institution also has a social nature, and different networks and social relations are an essential part of becoming an author and acting in the literary field (Leskelä-Kärki 2006, 53). Elvi Sinervo worked as an assistant editor at *Kirjallisuuslehti* and wrote reviews for both newspapers. During the 1930s, *Kirjallisuuslehti* and *Tulenkantajat* published many of her short stories and poems. She also won a short-story competition for young writers, organized by the Tulenkantajat-society in 1933, which certainly boosted her confidence as a budding author. Later, Elvi Sinervo referred to that short story as the “starting point of her serious writing” (Sinervo, undated manuscript).

For the young author, getting texts published was important, because it opened the way into the literary field and provided her with an opportunity to earn money from her writing. This made it possible for her to concentrate on her writing without
having to seek another source of income. She considered intellectual work to be more satisfying than ordinary daily work. Working in an Elanto bakery shop in the summer of 1934 was the only traditional manual work that she ever did. After that, she concentrated on studying and writing, and participating in political and cultural organizations. As a result, despite her working-class background, Elvi Sinervo grew apart from the daily life of the working class as she rose into the middle class.

Picture 1. Elvi Sinervo gives a reading of her poem at the grave of her friend, poet Katri Vala, in 1945. Photo: Yrjö Lintunen. Source: Kansan Arkisto (The People’s Archives).
While Kirjallisuuslehti and Tulenkantajat offered publication channels to writers and people who aimed to become writers, they also offered a conversational community and social network for the Finnish left-wing intelligentsia. The group included journalists, authors, and politicians—such as Raoul Palmgren, Jarno Pennanen, and Kaisu-Mirjami Rydberg—and its activities were based on a shared socialist worldview, cooperation in different projects, and friendship, all concentrating on literature and cultural work. In 1936, writers of the left-wing intelligentsia founded the author group Kiila (Wedge) to advance socialist literature in Finland; yet the birth of Kiila was affected by both domestic and international factors. In Finland, leftist writers lived in the shadow of bourgeois literary institutions, which is why they wanted to form a unified front and create an aesthetic program based on their shared socialist worldview. Their goal was to create an alternative to the dominant conception of bourgeois literature. Finnish leftist writers followed the international authors’ meeting in Paris in 1935 with interest, and it also gave a stimulus to act in Finland, where attempts to form a cultural front of liberal and leftist forces were appearing. This cultural front did not succeed, but the left-wing writers decided to found an organization of their own, and thus Kiila saw the light of day (Sallamaa 1994, 59–60).

Elvi Sinervo was one of the founding members of Kiila, and from 1951 to 1955 she acted as its chair. Members of Kiila were connected to each other by their worldview, based on socialism and a shared aesthetic program. They focused their artistic creative ability on the proletariat and tried to depict their feelings and to take part in their struggles (Toimitus 1936). Though Kiila had its own program, it did not try to homogenize the work of its members either ideologically or artistically. The group also undertook publishing activities, and annual albums (anthologies) of Kiila were very important for many who wanted to become authors, as through them they were able to publish their texts (Sallamaa 1994, 59–64).

Kiila was important for leftist writers because it offered a community in which they could discuss their writing and bring their texts to be critiqued. Literary conversations and mutual critiques helped young authors like Elvi Sinervo to find their place in the literary field. In Kiila, there were authors who had been published before Elvi Sinervo’s first book was released. It was essential for a beginner to see herself as a part of this network and to compare her own writing style and practices with others. She especially revered authors like Pentti Haanpää, Katri Vala, Viljo Kajava, and Iiris Uurto, although sometimes this comparison might have been somewhat depressing for the self-esteem of a young author.
I settled an account with Uurto because I felt that something she said about my writings was threatening to cause me a complex. I asked her whether she really thought all that she said about my texts. Yes, she said, they never touched her in any way. Hearing that did not make me very happy, because I have always considered her to be an authority in the field of literature. But now I feel that I have chosen my path and I will stay on it, and if I fail, there will be nothing more left than “she got married.”

**TO BECOME A REAL AUTHOR**

In her article in this volume, Hanne Koivisto examines the internationality of Finnish left-wing intellectuals. Like other members of the intelligentsia, Elvi Sinervo closely followed international literature and read the same books from the same authors as others, but naturally each of them had their own favorites. Elvi Sinervo could read in German and in Swedish; she also tried to improve her Russian and English. The bourgeois and its nationally introverted literature policy in Finland were also evident in the selective nature of translation into Finnish. Left intellectuals, including Elvi Sinervo, tried to improve this situation with their translations in *Kirjallisuuslehti* and *Tulenkantajat*, and they translated texts from modern European, Soviet, and American literature. Sinervo herself pointed out that the narrowness of the Finnish translation policy prevented workers who did not speak any language other than Finnish from familiarizing themselves with the lives of workers of other countries. In her view, there should also have been translations from West European proletarian and Soviet literature. In a review of Fjodor Gladkow’s book *Uusi maa* (New land), which she read in German (*Neue Erde*) she wrote:

> If somebody offers to publishers translations of Western European proletarian literature, it is too brutal; young people need something uplifting. On the other hand, Soviet literature, which represents workers’ and peasants’ efforts in the huge work of reform, makes them raise their hands in horror: propaganda! Bourgeois publishing houses make sure that

---

2 “Selvittelin vähän väärejäni Uurron kanssa, hänestä uhkasi kehittyä minulle kompleksi, ennenkaikkea senuoksi, mitä hän sanoi minun kirjoittamisestani. Kysyin, ajatteliko hän todella kaikkia sitä minun teksteistäni, mitä hän sanoi. Juu, sen hän tekee, ne eivät ole koskaan millään tavoin koskettaneet häntä. Tuo ei tehnyt minua iloiseksi, sillä olen aina pitänyt häntä auktoriteetina kirjallisuuden alalla. Mutta minusta tuntuu, että minä olen nyt kerta kaikkiaan valinnut sen tien, ja jos tulen siinäkin epäonnistumaan, silloin ei minusta koskaan tule olemaan mihinkään, jää vain se, että ’hän oli mennyt naimisiin.’” (Sinervo 1937a)
their youth get “hero-ids” from the Third Reich. If the working-class youth need “hero idols,” isn’t it natural that they would get them from the characters that Gladkow and many others represent, from workers who build a new society?³

One of the most important authors for the Finnish left intelligentsia was Maksim Gorky. For Sinervo, Gorky was a role model, and she had an emotional and personal attitude toward him. To her husband, with whom she shared a love for Gorky, Sinervo wrote about Gorky’s book *Mat’* (*The Mother* in Finnish *Äiti*): “It is not possible to love any other author like him; it almost hurts to know that he is dead” (Sinervo 1937a). Elvi Sinervo read Gorky’s book either in Swedish or in German, because his main works were not at that point translated into Finnish. In 1941, she started to translate *Mat’* from Swedish and German into Finnish; she had to do so, because she did not know Russian well enough. However, she did not find a publisher for her translation, and later the manuscript was destroyed in a fire (Kalemaa 1989, 109–10).

Nevertheless, during this translation process, Elvi Sinervo found many similarities between herself and Gorky as authors. She thought that their way of looking at and depicting people was similar. She also found themes in *Mat’* that defined the activity of the Finnish left intellectuals during the 1930s and 1940s. In his book, Gorky depicted contradictions and confrontations parallel to those that were occurring in the real lives of the Finnish left intellectuals at that time, and also episodes that were familiar to the whole extreme left during the Winter War and Interim Peace, like house searches and arrests. Sinervo’s respect for Gorky can be seen in her own works, especially in *Viljami Vaihdokas* (*Viljami, the changeling*, 1946) where many intertextual references to Gorky’s books can be found.

The period between the world wars resulted in a decline in cultural modernization in Finland, and this could also be seen in literature. There were attempts to use literature as building material for national identity and bourgeois ideology. These attempts brought out national icons from J. L. Runeberg to Juhani Aho; there was also a simultaneous effort to criminalize critics of basic bourgeois values such

---

as patriotism, independence, and the Lutheran church (Sevänen 1999, 254–55). In this atmosphere, it was difficult for leftist writers to publish their texts in the bourgeois publishing houses, even though it was not impossible, as Sinervo’s example demonstrates. Her first book, a collection of short stories, Runo Söörnäisistä (A poem about Sörnäinen), was released from the publishing house K. J. Gummerus in 1937. It contains short stories previously published in Kirjallisuuslehti and Tulenkantajat. Most of these short stories were about people, adults, and children who lived in working-class districts in Sörnäinen in Helsinki and in Palosaari in Vaasa. K. J. Gummerus was one of the most liberal publishing houses in Finland at that time, but Sinervo still had to submit to some political editorial cuts and make compromises about the short stories included in the collection. The representative of Gummerus thought that the stories chosen for the collection by Sinervo were too dark, and in his view some positive subjects such as “happy workers in the allotment garden” would have been needed. In the end, the collection was, however, published without any major changes (Sinervo 1937e, 1937f).

The first reader of the collection was Mauri Ryömä. In a letter, he wrote his thoughts about the book. In his opinion, the short story as a form of literature could not bring out the diversity of life. He saw that his wife was too committed to producing texts that followed the model of socialist realism. In addition to objective observation, he wanted more subjective opinions from the writer. Still, the collection showed that she was a gifted author, but in her next books he felt that she should think about these questions: “Does she have something to say? What it is that she wanted to say?” (Ryömä 1937).

In his review, Raoul Palmgren also saw Runo Söörnäisistä as representative of the new style known as socialist realism (1937, 331–32). In the Soviet Union, socialist realism had been accepted as the only, and official, method of art in 1934. There had also been discussions about socialist realism in Finland, but in the end, Finnish leftist authors were not that interested in just one form of literature. They thought the form was less important than the content of the literature and the ideological commitment to the struggle of the working class (Sallamaa 1994, 158–61). Working-class writers were supposed to be the moving force of social change, to show the defects of society for working-class people, and to stress the possibility of change.

Elvi Sinervo was a good example of that line of thinking. Different artistic movements made her think about the function of art as a social phenomenon and her own role as a writer. She stressed the intelligibility of literature to “ordinary
working-class people,” which was why, for example, she was suspicious of surrealism, which did interest some of the leftist intellectuals, like her friend Jarno Pennanen, as evident in his first collection of poems, *Rivit* (The lines, 1937). Sinervo thought that Pennanen’s poetry was skillfully crafted, but at the same time it was too difficult for ordinary workers, as she felt that they were not yet ready for that kind of literature. Still, she believed that it was possible for working-class people to develop as readers, and she saw that complicated poetry such as Pennanen’s could later become a possibility (Sinervo 1937b, 1937c, 1937d). Pennanen’s style was very different from the other writers of Kiila, including Sinervo’s own texts. Her view about Pennanen’s poetry can be seen as a question regarding the direction of working-class literature, but also reflecting uncertainty in respect to her own burgeoning first works.

During the 1930s, Elvi Sinervo had two different roles. She was an active agent in political organizations, but she was also an author who took her writing seriously both in a social and artistic sense, and these two sides cannot be separated from each other. Even though she occasionally underestimated her own writing, it was still a very important part of her life, and she felt that she was alive when she could write and through writing reflect the world around her. For her, writing was the most important way to take an active part in politics and in the work of the labor movement.

Sinervo revealed her ideas about literature in her book reviews, which she wrote for *Kirjallisuuslehti*, *Tulenkantajat*, and *Soihtu*. In these critiques, she examined books through the social aspects they contained, but she did not forget their form and content. In her opinion, the social aspects of a book should not require an artistic compromise. She also emphasized the importance of development, which should be shown in the activity and thinking of the figures in the book. They should be active actors, not passive onlookers. This sentiment is reflected in Sinervo’s review in *Kirjallisuuslehti* of Tyyne-Maija Salminen’s novel *Tuntematon huomen* (Unknown tomorrow, 1935), which was a story about a young married working-class couple and their way from happiness to misery:

> Her (Salminen’s) depiction moves only among the part of the working class who were discouraged by the blows they received during the years of the Lapua Movement and who no longer have the courage to act, hardly even to hope. Its individuals are conscious of where they belong, but they have lost faith in their class.⁴

⁴ “Hänen [Salmisen] kuvauksensa liikkuu yksinomaan sen työväestön parissa, joka lannistui lapualaisvuosina saamistaan iskuista, ei uskalla enää toimia, tuskin toivoa. Sen yksilöt ovat
Elvi Sinervo also criticized Helvi Hämäläinen’s novel *Katuojan vettä* (Gutter water, 1935), which was about a single mother in a working-class district during the depression of the 1930s, for depicting workers as passive because she did not see any figures that represented the power of the working class, and its quality as a rising class (Sinervo 1936, 42–43). On the other hand, she advocated that literature should be literature and not propaganda, and she found Arvo Turtiainen’s novel *Rautakourat* (The iron hands, 1938) about a real strike in the year 1937 to be a little too propagandist—the problem was in Turtiainen’s way of emphasizing the strike instead of the people:

[. . .] kirjoittaja on lähtenyt lakosta, selostanut sen vaiheet, sen uuden mikä tässä lakossa ilmeni, sensijaan, että olisi kuvannut ihmisiä, jotka tekivät lakon, ja miten se muutti heitä ja mitä uutta se heissä synnytti.

[. . .] The writer has taken the strike as his starting point, explained all the new stages occurring in this strike, when instead he should have represented the people who made the strike and how it changed them and what new it brought up in them. (Sinervo 1938, 301–2)

The 1930s was an active period both culturally and politically for the Finnish leftist intelligentsia. However, such activity slowed down toward the end of the decade, and Sinervo concentrated on writing her second book, which was released in the autumn of 1939. It was her first novel, and it was called *Palavankylän seppä* (Blacksmith of Palavankylä, 1939). It is an autobiographical depiction of her family moving to Ostrobothnia after the Civil War. The landscapes and episodes of childhood in Ostrobothnia, which was now a strong power base of the Whites, were imprinted on Sinervo’s memory, and she used those experiences and memories in her new novel. Indeed, there were strong autobiographical and biographical aspects in all her writings, not only in this first novel; she took her themes and figures from her surroundings, from the things that had happened and the things she had gone through and from the people she had met (Sinervo 1937g). Sometimes she planned to write a novel about her best friend, sometimes about her sister and her husband, and sometimes about her father-in-law. These plans were never realized as such, but all these people and many others were immortalized in her texts.
The Mark Left by Prison

Elvi Sinervo’s life in the 1930s was full of intense activity, in the cultural and the political sphere and in her private and public life. This period of her life stopped during 1940 and 1941 when she, among many others including her husband Mauri Ryömä, was sentenced to prison for political reasons, primarily for acting in the Suomen-Neuvostoliiton rauhan ja ystävyyden seura (Finnish-Soviet Union Peace and Friendship Society), which was classified as a forbidden communist organization. The Court of Appeals of Turku sentenced Sinervo to three years in prison. Sinervo could not accept this verdict because she felt that she had done nothing criminal, and she maintained that she was innocent of high treason, of which she was accused. In her appeal letter to the Supreme Court, she pointed out that her sentence was based on incorrect assumptions, cursory studies, and a frivolous trial (Erich 1941). However, this did nothing to help her case; on the contrary, the Supreme Court added one year more to her sentence. She completed her imprisonment in Hämeenlinnan keskus- ja lääninvankila (Central and Provincial Prison of Hämeenlinna)—a prison for women, in which there were other female political prisoners. In the summer of 1944, she was released.

This time in prison had a significant influence on Elvi Sinervo’s worldview. When she went to prison, she was a leftist social democrat, and she denied being a communist. However, when she was released, she had indeed become a communist, and in 1945 she joined the Suomen Kommunistinen Puolue (Communist Party of Finland, SKP), which was set up in the new post-war environment of 1944. But why did she convert to communism? In the 1930s, she was already disappointed in Finnish social democracy, and these disappointments grew deeper during wartime because of the nationalist and rightist war policy of the SDP. The question of peace had been one of the most important matters for Sinervo during the 1930s, and she felt that the SDP no longer represented an ideology of peace. Moreover, the oppressive experiences of prison and the uncomfortable situation of political prisoners confirmed Sinervo’s new political thinking.

In prison she came into contact with other political prisoners, almost all of whom were members of the underground Communist Party of Finland. Political prisoners formed a close-knit community, a circle of comrades, that tried to maintain and develop the political consciousness, activity, and morale of its members within the circumstances of prison, and in that way tried to present a resistance to the power of the prison authorities. For Sinervo, acting in this circle of comrades with its study activities, secret conversations, and correspondence provided
new viewpoints on political action and thinking. For example, she wrote letters to
Hertta Kuusinen, who after the war became the leader of the Communist Party of
Finland. This correspondence shaped Sinervo’s own thoughts about communism.
Though she did not always fully agree with Hertta Kuusinen or the ideas of the circle
of comrades and could not always act in accordance with its rules, she still thought
that being one of them was important for her to get through her prison sentence
(Torninoja-Latola 2011, 75).

Writing in prison was challenging because of its many restrictive and con-
trolling rules. Political prisoners were not allowed to write a diary or any fiction,
and their letters were censored by the prison authorities. However, writing was so
important to Sinervo and for her mental health that she continuously searched for
ways to write secretly. For example, she purposely broke the rules of the prison
because she wanted to be sent to a punishment cell where she could be alone and
write. Being alone and in peace was so important to her writing that she did not
even care how uncomfortable or cold the punishment cell was. Toilet paper was the
only paper available, which she wrote on with a pen she had managed to smuggle
into the cell in the hem of her skirt.

In spite of these difficult circumstances in prison, Sinervo was able to write
some fiction. In prison she finished one children’s play Onnenmaan kuninkaantytär ja
ihmislapset (The daughter of the king of Luckland and the children), one play called
Desantti, and the collection of poems titled Pilvet (Clouds); they all were published
after the war in 1944 and 1945 (Torninoja-Latola 2011, 68–69, 74). She also wrote
many drafts, which she subsequently finished after the war; for example, she started
her novel Viljami Vaihdokas in prison, and finished it in 1946. These books written
in prison, like many of her later works, were about the experiences Sinervo went
through during her incarceration. Yet she also wanted to write about the stories she
had heard in the prison from other political prisoners. These stories were about the
members of the underground communist movement and about the difficulties they
faced in the 1930s and during the Second World War.

The mark left by her prison term emerged in the world of her books, both as
concrete spaces and events and in her ideological viewpoints. Writing poems was
the best way to vent her feelings of grief, fear, longing, and anxiety but also of soli-
darity, loyalty, and optimism. In the difficult circumstances of prison, it was easier
to write poems than longer stories: there was a lack of both writing material and
available time. Her most famous poetry collection, Pilvet, consisted solely of poems
written during her time in prison; they were stories about prison life from many
different angles, from the day she arrived to the time she knew she would soon be released into a quite different world. *Pilvet* was published in the autumn of 1944, and it became a very important book for many people with the same experiences.

**The Time of Optimism**

After the Second World War, the atmosphere among Finnish leftist intellectuals was optimistic and enthusiastic because of the new political situation. They were full of hope that they could finally come out from the shadow of bourgeois cultural hegemony, and they were ready to make their own visions come true. They also made a lot of new international contacts, both in their personal lives and within their different international organizations (cf., e.g., Salmi-Niklander, this volume).

Elvi Sinervo also plunged into writing and into political activities immediately following her release from prison. Her post-war literary works were created between the years 1944 and 1956, including works that were written in prison and, of course, her central work, the novel *Viljami Vaihdokas*. In addition to these, she wrote a novel *Toveri älä petä* (Comrade, do not betray us, 1947); the plays *Toukokuun viimeisenä iltana* (On the last evening of May, 1948) and *Maailma on vasta nuori* (The world is still young, 1952); and a short story collection *Vuorelle nousu* (Climbing to the mountain, 1948), as well as two collections of poems, *Oi lintu mustasiipi* (Oh, the bird with black wing, 1950) and *Neidonkaivo* (The maiden's well, 1956). Now it was easier for leftist writers to find a publisher, and Sinervo’s books were published by Tammi and Kansankulttuuri.

In Sinervo’s postwar works, one can clearly see the change in her political thinking and worldview, which had happened during her prison term. The themes of her postwar books were increasingly based on ideological grounds, and the characters’ political thinking was now on a more conscious level than in the books she had written before the war. *Viljami Vaihdokas* is a story about a young boy who, after many phases and a long journey, at last comes to a place that feels like home for him. There he meets people who are good to him, and soon he gets to know that they belong to the underground communist movement. In their circle, he finds what he has searched for throughout his journey, and they include him as a part of their world. He commits himself to the group and absorbs its worldview, actions, and principles. One of the most important of these principles is that one may never betray one’s comrade in any circumstance, because in the underground communist movement this was a matter of life and death; as his friend Simo tells him: “But if there is a weak link in the chain, it can ruin all.” Viljami faces his own destiny in this
way. He does not want to be the weak link who betrays his comrades, and that is why he is beaten to death during an interrogation by the state police (Sinervo 1946). Questions about who is reliable, who is a traitor, and how it is possible to gain confidence repeatedly occupied Sinervo’s mind.

In her public life, Sinervo became more outspoken about political and cultural issues. She gave speeches and wrote to newspapers about issues that she considered important. Particularly, she stressed the responsibility of the author; in her opinion, a writer who was a communist had to be an example to those who were still searching for their worldview, their path in the political jungle. In a 1948 speech, she said:

An author must know a lot. An author must be wise. It is his/her responsibility. An author must look around with seeing eyes and know the soul of a human being and all that influences it. An author must understand, and it is impossible to understand people unless one knows or understands why they are like they are. And this is why—and this is our program—an author must be aware of the society in which people live and understand what the point of social struggle is. 5

Because Sinervo took her subjects from the leftist world and because her texts clearly represented her worldview, many people from the bourgeois literary field found her writing tendentious. Most critics valued her literary skills but not the ideological basis of her works, which can be seen in Kai Laitinen’s review of the book *Toveri älä petä*: “If a politician in her suppresses a poet in her, we have lost one of the most gifted and most original writers” (Kalemaa 1989, 195). The strong influence of the leftist forces in the cultural field during the late 1940s helped leftist writers come to public attention, and they were now considered for literary prizes. Sinervo was the first author of Kiila to be awarded the literary prize of the state, for her novel *Viljami Vaihdokas* (Kalemaa 1989, 187).

Sinervo thought that it was not possible to find such a thing as neutral art. In her opinion, art that was generally called neutral and pure was still based on the writer’s view of life, just as socialist art was based on a socialist view of life. Sinervo demanded that the conception of art had to be expanded to include socialist writers.

---

Their writing was also based on real artistic inspiration, and they also wrote with all their hearts, and with their heads, about all they had seen and experienced. Although art was not politics and politics was not art, writing about politics could be art. The most important thing in writing was to be honest to oneself and to others (Sinervo 2012, 208–9).

Sinervo was also able to expand her view of life through many international connections. Before the war, she had visited the Soviet Union only once, but in the postwar world, doors to new places opened. Mainly, she travelled in socialist countries, where she familiarized herself with the countries and met local authors. She also took part in different international meetings of authors and other cultural

Picture 2. Elvi Sinervo with Icelandic writer Halldor Laxness, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1955. Laxness visited Finland in 1956 and met Sinervo there. Source: Kansan Arkisto (The People's Archives).
agents, including a trip to Wroclaw, Poland, in August 1948 as a representative for Kiila in the Cultural Congress for Peace. Sinervo traveled in these countries as a conscious communist; she wanted to see how people lived in socialist countries. She wrote travel stories for newspapers based on her impressions, which were mainly positive (or at least any negative feelings she did have were not aired in public).

FROM AUTHOR TO TRANSLATOR

Elvi Sinervo started her career as a translator during the 1930s, when she translated various works for the *Kirjallisuuslehti*. Her first published translation was a book by Anna Bondenstam, which Sinervo translated from Swedish to Finnish during her last year in prison. She continued to translate works during the 1940s and 1950s, but it was not until the 1960s that she became a full-time translator. Primarily, she translated from Swedish and German. In this work, she held quite similar principles to those she held as an author; she translated only books that represented her own ideas about literature, which is why she translated many books from German leftist writers, such as Bertolt Brecht and Anna Seghers. She also translated books from Finland-Swedish authors. Henrik Tikkanen requested that she translate his books in spite of resistance from his publisher. Sinervo’s career as a translator was wide-ranging and lasted into the mid-1980s (Vanharanta 2007, 476–79).

This poses the question: why did Elvi Sinervo stop writing her own works? There is not one answer to this question. However, one reason was her political disappointment. At the end of the 1940s, the extreme left was pushed to the political opposition when the SKDL lost in the elections and had to relinquish its place in the government. This meant that the situation in the cultural field became more difficult for leftist artists, because they had lost their political support. There were also internal political struggles in the SKP. Leftist intellectuals who had joined the party after the war were especially disappointed at the politics and practices of the party, and there were many ideological conflicts between them and party leaders. Sinervo made her own decisions at the end of the 1950s; her worldview had already suffered a serious blow in 1956 when the cruelties of the Stalin era in the Soviet Union came to light. She did not leave the party immediately, but later resigned in 1960. In her farewell letter to the SKP, she said that she still was a communist but she could not approve of the unjust methods used by the party against its members and that was why she could no longer be a member (Sinervo 1960).

These ideological and political disappointments were certainly one reason why, as an author, she fell silent. The basis on which she had legitimized her writing
crumbled. She was also frustrated because she felt that her writing did not provoke a proper response among workers or in literary circles. Workers did not buy her books, and reviewers, especially bourgeois critics, criticized her works because of their political leanings. She felt again the uncertainty that had been familiar to her from her early years: why write, when you have not been able to achieve the targets you have set for yourself in an ideological or artistic sense? In 1958, her husband, Mauri Ryömä, died in a car accident, which was a great loss for Sinervo. She lost her lover and her intellectual support, and their children lost their father. Sinervo now became the breadwinner, and she earned more as a translator than as an author. There was no longer time for her to think, or to write her own texts.

In the background of Sinervo’s authorship were her own experiences and thoughts, but also different social contexts, ideological leanings, and public events. Her career lasted about twenty years, and it was marked with the idea of the author as an active agent and as a leader of social opinion. At the same time that she was a product of her own age, she also had the possibility to redefine it. She taught others that the duty of a socialist author was to produce literature that presented new perspectives on social questions and demands, and to be part of the political struggle of working-class people. For Elvi Sinervo, this idea dominated her whole career, and after the war, it became more programmatic and goal-directed and gained a clear ideological foundation. Writing was related to her other social activities and had an important role in it. When that ideological basis then broke down, she had to rethink her writing from a new perspective, which was surely one reason why she eventually gave it up.

REFERENCES
Erich, Mikko. 1941. Promemoria Turun hovioikeudelle [Memorandum to the Supreme Court of Turku]. [Copy]. Elvi Sinervo’s Personal Archives. Helsinki: Kansan Arkisto [The People’s Archives].


Kurikka, Kaisa, and Veli-Matti Pynttäri. 2006. “Siinä tekijä missä tutkija” [Where there is an author, there is a researcher]. In *Tekijyyden tekstit* [The texts of authorship], edited by Kaisa Kurikka and Veli-Matti Pynttäri, 7–15. Helsinki: SKS.


______. Undated manuscript. Elvi Sinervo’s Personal Archives. Helsinki: Kansan Arkisto [The People’s Archives].


Reshaping Finnish Working-Class Prose: Hannu Salama’s *Siinä näkijä missä teki jää* as a Postrealistic Novel

Milla Peltonen  
University of Turku

Abstract

This article surveys Hannu Salama’s contribution to the reshaping of working-class literature in the 1960s and 1970s. The main focus is on Salama’s novel *Siinä näkijä missä teki jää* (Where there’s a crime, there’s a witness, 1972), a pioneering work of Finnish postrealism. Postrealism reshapes both the themes and the narrative structure of traditional realism. With the help of several character-narrators, the novel breaks down the autocracy of the omniscient narrator, often held to be the ideological voice of a grand narrative; in Finnish literature, this is usually a bourgeois rather than a working-class one. In *Siinä näkijä missä teki jää*, ordinary workers describe their experience in the communist resistance movement during the Second World War in Finland. They also comment on the political context of the late 1960s. In the 1970s, Salama’s novel raised polemics, but today it is regarded as one of the most innovative classics in all Finnish literature.

Introduction

“In spite of the death of the traditional realistic novel announced in the 1960s, some fashion of realism has continued to flourish.” This sentence by Eileen Williams-Wanquet (2006, 389) refers to British literature, but holds true of Finnish literature as well. In fact, realism has remained stronger in Finland than in many other countries, but over the past decades, it has also changed and been divided into various subgenres. One of these, which can be called postrealism, arose in working-class literature during the 1960s and 1970s. It is the creation, in particular, of Hannu
Salama, the best-known but also the most controversial Finnish working-class author of the time.

Hannu Salama was born in 1936 in Kouvola, a town in southeastern Finland, but he spent most of his childhood and youth in Tampere, now the third-largest city in Finland. He went to school for nine years, plus one year at a folk high school, Orivesi College. In 1961, when his debut novel, *Se tavallinen tarina* (The common story), came out, he became a full-time writer. The second novel, *Juhannustantsit* (The Midsummer dance, 1964), brought him a suspended prison sentence for blasphemy, but he was pardoned by President Urho Kekkonen in 1968. *Juhannustantsit* was followed by two large-scale novels, *Minä, Olli ja Orvokki* (Me, Olli, and Orvokki, 1967) and *Siinä näkijä missä tekijä* (Where there’s a crime, there’s a witness, 1972), which foregrounded proletarian life, including that of a young working-class writer. For *Siinä näkijä missä tekijä*, Salama was awarded the Nordic Council Literature Prize in 1975. His most grandiose work, however, is the Finlandia-sarja (The Finlandia series). The series consists of six intricate novels published between 1976 and 1983 (published together in 1984), depicting left-wing working-class intellectuals as part of the middle class in a new, ever-changing social context.

His next major work, *Ottopoika* (Otto the adopted), appeared in 1991. It gives a carnivalistic view of Otto Wille Kuusinen, the Finnish politician, writer, and socialist theorist, who escaped to Russia after the Finnish Civil War (1918), and who became a member of the Politburo and Stalin’s ideological adviser. One of Salama’s recent novels is *Sydän paikallaan* (Heart in place, 2010), in which the main character (and narrator), a writer by the name of Hans von Blixt, offers a harsh critique of capitalism, of the compliant middle class, and of global ecocide. Overall, Salama has published twenty novels, seven collections of short stories, five collections of poetry, a play, and some other works. Nevertheless, only a few of his short stories have been translated into English, such as “The Funeral” (from the collection *Kesäleski* 1969; in English, *Books from Finland* 1988), and “Catarrh” (from *Lomapäivä* 1962; in English, *Dimension* 1994).

In this article, I focus mainly on Salama’s novel *Siinä näkijä missä tekijä*, the first work to radically remodel both the traditions of working-class literature and the genre of the realistic novel in Finland. I will first look at the development of postrealism in the context of the contemporary genre known as “the broadly epic working-class novel” (Laitinen 2001, 142), including Salama’s earlier novel *Minä, Olli ja Orvokki*. I then explore the narration of *Siinä näkijä missä tekijä* and show that the change in narrative structure is connected to ideological ruptures and postmodern
thinking but also to the realist tradition. With the help of narrative theory, I analyze on the one hand the character-narrators, who are now given a significant role in scanning the history of the Finnish working class, and, on the other, the omniscient narrator, who loses his power as the self-evident explainer of the world.

A FOUNDATION FOR POSTREALISM

In the 1960s and 1970s, the broadly epic working-class Finnish novel underwent a revival. Most of the writers in this genre are characterized by the two “absolute” criteria for a working-class author listed by Raoul Palmgren (1965, 222): (1) proletarian roots and life experience; and (2) a proletarian vision of life. By the latter, Palmgren refers to a working-class worldview in the broadest sense, in terms of seeing and interpreting life “from below”; he does not necessarily refer to a Marxist ideology or to a party program. This writing more or less follows the conventions of the realistic novel. Moreover, writers in this genre did not have to experience a left-wing political awakening; they came from working-class families. According to Laitinen, the most powerful achievements in the genre were produced by a few male writers: Hannu Salama, Alpo Ruuth, Lassi Sinkkonen, Samuli Paronen, and Jorma Ojaharju (1991, 560).

While Palmgren’s criteria can be criticized (cf. articles of Elsi Hyttinen and Veli-Matti Pynttäri in this volume), the delineation suggested by Laitinen is still by and large valid; however, it needs some clarification. There are certain differences between the production of the above-mentioned authors, and we can divide the broadly epic working-class novel of the 1960s and 1970s into two trends. On the one hand, there are writers who follow the tradition of social realism more or less faithfully. These novels are controlled by an omniscient narrator, they are based on an orderly and integrated plot, and they portray the individual as a member of a group. The novels also contain frequent descriptions of settings as well as dialogue dealing with contemporary society and party politics, including internal conflicts within the labor movement. One example is Alpo Ruuth’s novel Kotimaa (Homeland, 1974), which tells the story of a young working-class couple in the early 1960s.

On the other hand, we find a new trend, postrealism, which can be said to remodel realism in a “postmodern” manner. It is both a thematic and a structural transformation. In postrealism, the omniscient narrator loses power to the character-narrator(s), and the linearity and causal integrity of the plot falls away. Work settings are increasingly replaced by the writer’s chamber, where a (male)
working-class writer thematizes the problems of his class, as well as the possibilities of grasping its history and writing about it. Postrealism thus questions the old devices used by realism to arrive at collective historical truths. The breakthrough of postrealism in Finnish literature takes place in the novel Siinä näkijä missä tekijä, in which the narration itself becomes a notable part of the action depicted (Peltonen 2005, 49–53).

Even before Siinä näkijä missä tekijä, however, postrealism had emerged in the 1960s. Hannu Salama’s earlier novel Minä, Olli ja Orvokki (1967) is a good example of the direction of this change, which destroys the autocracy of the omniscient narrator and the assumptions that accompany it. According to Pertti Karkama—the first to note the presence of postrealism in Finnish literature—the disappearance of the omniscient narrator was one clear sign of the turn from realism to postrealism (1988, 243). As Karkama indicates, it was replaced by the “I,” the male character-narrator who takes part in the recent events of the story. He is presented more and more as a passive participant in the fictional world, not above the other characters but parallel to them. While he is privileged as being both perceiver and narrator, he is not presented as a stable focus of the narrative world in either cognitive or evaluative terms. This kind of character-narrator already challenges both the idea of the individual subject and the grand narratives questioned by postmodern thinking: with the vanishing of a higher-level focus to organize the world, the character-narrator becomes merely an uncertain part of everyday existence, still reporting his life in plausible scenarios, but unable to comprehend it (243; see also Karkama 1997, 222, 230).

In Minä, Olli ja Orvokki, this character-narrator is Harri Salminen, a semi-bohemian working-class writer—or a new variant of it (also known as the alter ego of Hannu Salama). Rather than the voice of a remote reporter or an “objective” analyst of society, he is an ordinary participant in the world and its actions. The topic of his narration is tangled everyday life, including heavy drinking and shattered relationships. From time to time, the act of writing is also depicted: Salminen reports about and reflects upon his uncompleted project, a historical novel that he calls “pispalaeepos” (an epic of Pispala). “Pispala” refers to a traditional working-class district in the city of Tampere, where Hannu Salama spent his childhood and which is also the main milieu in Siinä näkijä missä tekijä. This “epic,” which evolves within the story of the novel, is meant to be Harri’s great working-class novel, which he compares to Toivo Pekkanen’s early works. Salminen identifies with Toivo Pekkanen and his protagonist and alter ego Samuli Oino in Tehtaan varjossa (In
the shadow of the factory) in terms of their originality among other workers and their will to survive by writing, but he wants to stand out from Pekkanen as well. He cannot tolerate the earlier writer’s conciliatory approach: “if Pekkanen had realized the need to make better use of his anger and resentment, the books would have been better than the social and constructive ones he wrote” (Salama 1967, 387). Salminen sees the classic working-class novel, following the traditional conventions of realism and aiming at a placatory view of his own class as part of the social body, as doomed to failure.

Furthermore, the past does not come alive in Harri Salminen’s mind. He even starts to question certain stories of the wartime Communist resistance movement that he has previously considered true. “Was this whole story true at all?” (Salama 1967, 66), he asks himself, trying to write about Pekka Toivola, an idealized local Communist, who survived brutal torture by the State Police in the 1940s. To Salminen, the whole thing just looks old and tired; in the late 1960s, there is no longer anything heroic about the proletariat, as in the times of the great working-class authors Väinö Linna and Lauri Viita, who are mentioned along with Toivo Pekkanen. The history of the working class seems to be falling to pieces. By way of Harri Salminen’s reflections on the realistic working-class tradition in connection with his own bookmaking, Minä, Olli ja Orvokki includes a metafictional level, which can be called the process of mimesis (Hutcheon [1980] 1984, 39–40). It is a metafictional device that draws attention to the narrative act and to the relationship between fact and fiction. Unlike radical postmodernist metafiction, however, postrealism still aims at the “truth”; however, it is increasingly aware of the fact that success in this quest is unlikely.

In Minä, Olli ja Orvokki, the omniscient narrator is thus entirely replaced by the critical character-narrator participating in the acts of the fictional world. The complete disappearance of the omniscient narrator is nevertheless only an early stage of Finnish postrealism. During the 1970s, it was the multiple-narrator structure that became more common. The first Finnish novel to use this structure successfully was Sii näkijä missä tekijä, which resembles Harri Salminen’s previously mentioned “pispalaeepos” in Minä, Olli ja Orvokki. The story occurs mainly in two time frames, the late 1960s and the 1940s, as recounted by several narrators and through several perceivers. A similar narrative structure was later adopted by other working-class authors as well, such as Keijo Siekkinen (Kuusitoistamiehinen pyramidi [The sixteen-man pyramid], 1981). Likewise, Pirkko Saisio’s novels from the 1970s clearly belong to this otherwise male-dominated literary trend (e.g., Elämänmeno
[The tenor of life], 1975). Today, however, Saisio is better known as something else: a dramatist, actress, feminist writer, developer of Finnish autofiction, and lesbian icon.

The Problem of Working-Class History in Siinä näkijä missä teki jä

To begin with, Siinä näkijä missä teki jä has four clear character-narrators: Maija Salminen, Santtu Salminen, Harri Salminen, and Jaska Lonkanen. They are presented as ordinary human beings living their mundane lives, and even their parlance comes from commonplace reality: it resembles the spoken language and dialects of the Tampere region. These character-narrators are responsible for the main part of the narration in their own sequences, in other words, the chapters titled according to their first names. Maija is responsible for eight sequences, her husband, Santtu, for seven, their son, Harri, for four, and Jaska for one long sequence.

The events narrated in these twenty sequences do not follow any obvious chronological order. Both past and present are referred to, and even the fictional present varies unexpectedly from narrator to narrator. For Maija and Santtu, the present lies somewhere in the late 1960s, as is clearly stated, especially in Maija’s narration: “now we’re writing the end of the sixties” (Salama 1972, 64). While both Maija and Santtu position themselves in the rolling 1960s, however, what they mainly talk about is wartime communist and anti-fascist action in Tampere in the early 1940s. They have firsthand experience of this: meetings of the prohibited Finnish–Soviet Peace and Friendship Society (SNS), their anti-war activities, propaganda, sabotage, and arrests. Harri concentrates on the same wartime period and the same people but does not refer to his subsequent narrative present. He adopts a child’s point of view, for example, reporting things that he has overheard:

Valde’s nose is a bit funny. His face too is a bit inward, but less than Jaska’s. The other communists are dad and mom and grandma and grandpa and Selma and Reska and Taisto and Gunilla and Vikki. And Toivola. I heard them in the hallway even though they were talking in a low voice and mom saw that the door was open, but I said I came to pee and mom said there’s a potty there, isn’t there. Then I went back to the room but I stayed in the hallway and went away only a little while before they finished the meeting.

1 English translations of Salama’s texts in this chapter are done by Milla Peltonen.
2 “Valdella on vähän kumma nenä. Senkin naama on vähän sisäänpäin muttei niin paljon kuin Jaskan. Muut kommunistit on isä ja äiti ja mummu ja vaari ja Selma ja Reska ja Taisto ja
Jaska Lonkanen’s present, in contrast, is somewhere in the late 1950s or early 1960s. His sequence is “originally” a letter to Santtu, and he, therefore, unlike the others, has two audiences: that within the fictional world (Santtu, also Maija) and readers in the real world. In his letter, he adds yet another personal viewpoint on wartime events among the local working class. Thus all the character-narrators in the novel are witness-narrators, telling their own side of shared events (as well as some private ones), and the narrative of Siinä näkijä missä teki jää evolves into a versatile and polyphonic web. In the process, it also becomes discordant: the character-narrators’ memories and ideas differ from one another so much that in some cases it is difficult for the reader to determine what exactly happened and who is right, in the context of the fiction.

This kind of explicit conflict-narrative can be connected to a view that was taking shape already in Minä, Olli ja Orvokki: it is difficult to find and communicate true information from the collective past. It seems almost impossible to arrive at a singular, verifiable account of it, but veracity nevertheless remains a serious goal. Santtu, for example, refers to this aim in saying, “The truth is this” (Salama 1972, 309), even though he is primarily able to give only his own version of historical events. All in all, the characters’ narration contains multiple views, gaps, and contradictions; as such, the structure of the book seems to declare that human reality is in fact always filled with contradictions and with questions for which there are no ultimate answers. Hence it would be a misrepresentation of reality to try to unify it or to create a harmonious picture of it. What the narrative structure of the novel manifests is that all we have of history are personal witnesses of lived reality, and that the closest we can get to “objectivity” and completeness is by hearing them side by side. It is no longer the narrator’s task to patch up the gaps and match up dissonant story lines, but the reader’s.

A key feature connected to this polyphonic structure is overt metafiction, which is also present in Minä, Olli ja Orvokki. In Siinä näkijä missä teki jää, the character-narrators frequently comment both on their own narration and on other narratives. For example, Santtu is aware of the fact that the hypothetical audience has already heard his wife, Maija, whose sequence opens the novel (although Santtu does not know what Maija has already revealed). He therefore refers every now and then to Maija’s possible revelations, as well as defends his own views, especially in the Gunilla ja Vikki. Ja Toivola. Minä kuulin eteisestä vaikka ne puhui hiljaa ja äiti näki että ovi oli auki, mutta minä sanoin että minä tulin pissalle ja äiti sanoi että onhan siellä pottu. Sitten menin takaisin kamariin mutta jääkin eteiseen ja menin vasta vähän ennen kuin ne lopetti kokouksen.” (Salama 1972, 80–81)
context of adultery. He tries to win over the audience. Maija and Santtu also refer to Jaska’s letter and see his views mainly as fabrications. To them, Jaska, another member of the forbidden SNS in the 1940s, is a liar and a class traitor, as he has served as an informer for the state police. Jaska himself defends his position: as a “double agent,” he has sought to protect the people of his own class, his comrades, and their illegal actions. Moreover, he explicitly places his own truth against that told by the bourgeoisie: he is writing against “the falsified histories written by the winners” (Salama 1972, 262). A similar intention is also found in Maija’s narration:

And if I don’t know anything else, I know at least one thing better than anyone else: my own life-story. There’s probably enough connections and stuff about organizations in it, because after all it’s part of the Finnish labor movement [. . .].

Thus, the sections narrated by the main characters of the book form a polyphonic counter-narrative to an official, somewhat right-wing version of Finnish history, which had ruled out the view of the working class and especially the view of dedicated communists. Siinä näkijä missä teki jää refers to the actual history of the Finnish workers and discloses their perspectives, although, of course, we are dealing with fictional characters. It is also one of the rare novels to deal with the wartime Communist resistance movement in Finland. In fiction, the movement and its aftermath were previously represented in Elvi Sinervo’s play Desantti (The resistance agent, 1945) and her novel Toveri älä petä (Comrade, don’t betray us, 1947), as well as in Arvo Turtiainen’s poetry from the 1940s and his prison diary Ihminen N:o 503/42 (Person no. 503/42, 1946). In the early 1970s, historical research on the subject was not yet available, except for Kommunismi Suomessa (Communism in Finland), by Anthony Upton (1970).

**Omniscient Narrator: What Is It Still Doing There?**

Alongside Maija, Santtu, Harri, and Jaska, however, there are ten sequences in Siinä näkijä missä teki jää—interlaced with the sequences of the character-narrators—that are untitled and narrated by an “omniscient” voice. Features of omniscience here include the ability to report the innermost thoughts and feelings of the characters, which are usually inaccessible to human observers, and the capacity for impersonal

---

3 “Ja jos en muuta osakaan, osaan ainakin sen minkä tiedän tarkemmin kuin kukaan muu: oman elämäntarinani. Kyllä kai siinä pitäs olla tarpeeks yhteys ja organisaatioo, onhan sekin yksi osa Suomen työväenliikkeestä [. . .].” (Salama 1972, 19)
synoptic narration (cf. Culler 2004, 26). This narrator, possessing super-human capacities, is above the characters depicted in its sections. It concentrates only on the past events of the 1940s and does not refer to the narrative present or to him/herself as a person. The narrative act itself is not visibly reflected, as it is in the character-narration of the novel.

After the character-narrators’ strong performance in the first half of the book, the sudden emergence of the omniscient narrator on page 137 causes astonishment. Why is it there, what is its function? In my view, the answer is again to be found in the tradition of realism. The omniscient narrator is there, on the one hand, to ensure the connection with the realistic tradition, with one of its typical conventions, a serious “will to reference” (Jefferson, 1986). On the other hand, it is there to attract the reader’s attention to itself as just one narrative device among others. And since the omniscient narrative voice is placed next to the character-narrators, it is no longer the only truth-holder of the events revealed. Alongside others, it actually loses its omniscience: it does not necessarily know more than the character-narrators, nor is its knowledge more significant than that of others. It has epistemological authority only in its own sequences, not in the novel as a whole. Thus its function is to draw the reader’s attention to itself as an “artificial” convention: next to the character-narrators, who speak like real people and participate plausibly in the action of the story, the omniscient narrative voice appears unnatural, or at least as an old-fashioned literary convention. Being too authoritative and “objective”—being simultaneously nowhere and everywhere—it no longer seems to fit into the picture. It does not correspond to the (post)modernizing world or to its proliferating values.

Moreover, the reader begins to wonder who is behind the omniscient voice. To whom does it belong? The answer can be found in the novel itself: Maija suggests that it might be her son, Harri Salminen. The third sentence of the novel refers to this possibility, when Maija narrates that “Harri came by today and interviewed us for his book” (Salama 1972, 7). At the very outset, Maija reveals that Harri is writing a novel about the workers’ life experience and is interviewing his parents for this purpose in the fictional present. We also learn that Harri is asking about the events of the communist, antifascist movement during the Second World War, and the second part of the novel, narrated mainly by the omniscient voice, focuses entirely on this subject. These third-person sequences about the “desants” and members of

---

4 The Finnish term for the left-wing wartime resistance movement was derived, by way of the Russian term desantnik, from the French descendre, referring to agents who were parachuted into enemy territory.
the communist “forest guards” sabotaging the war can be inferred to be the same “pispalaeepos” (or part of it) which Harri Salminen was planning already in *Minä, Olli ja Orvokki*. Now, however, Harri Salminen himself is not operating as a skeptical character-narrator, but the others are, even if they are still trying to tell the truth “looking the way it actually was” (Salama 1972, 261).

Furthermore, Maija portrays Harri as a person who talks “as though he were omniscient” (Salama 1972, 71). This can be interpreted as a part of Maija’s critique of the narration by somebody who claims to have inside knowledge, but who has not experienced past events in person—or if he has, he was just a child who could not comprehend much of what he saw. As an adult narrator, Harri is thus “asserting” omniscience, as a speech-act theorist might put it (see, e.g., Searle 1979, 65). Hannu Salama (1995) himself has referred to this, revealing one of his intentions: there is a bit of irony here directed at war writers who write idealistic-realistic novels of war, even if they have never experienced it themselves. The omniscient narration in the second part of the novel can thus be interpreted as a parody of the heroic war novel, including the heroism of socialist realism, which was actually expected of Salama in communist circles in the early 1970s. But rather than depicting ideal communists or a fulfilled socialist utopia, *Siinä näkijä missä tekijä* uncovers disagreements within the working class as well. The sequences narrated by the omniscient voice also give probable reasons for the failure in antifascist action: ideological disputes and a lack of both confidence and solidarity. There are no stereotypical positive heroes of the working class to be found, even in the 1940s.

The parody of the epic, then, is to be understood as an internal critique of realism and working-class literature. It is a significant part of the postrealist endeavor to deconstruct certain updated conventions of social(ist) realism, specifically that of omniscient narration serving the idealization of the history of a class or the nation. There are in fact several paratexts in which Salama himself expresses an antipathy towards a mimesis that is idealized, polished, and stripped of contradictions (e.g., Salama 1980, 306–8). Instead, he has incorporated his own more or less empirical knowledge, and that of others in his family, within his personal vision. In addition, he has read some of the historical documents held in the People’s Archives (cf. Saarikoski 1972). One of Salama’s expressed aspirations has thus been to represent reality as it *is* to him and as it probably *was*, not as it should be or should have been.

At the same time, however, Salama has emphasized that the worlds of his novels are essentially “invented” and fictional (cf. Saarikoski 1972). The reader of Salama’s postrealism thus has to accept the fact that in the novels fabrication is always mixed
with factual information. There is, however, nothing new about this, but rather it’s something characteristic of realistic fiction in general: it is annoyingly somewhere “in the middle.” As Furst has put it, the reality of the realistic novel is not factual but not completely untruthful either (1995, 25). It does not fully correspond to the reality external to the text, but it is not independent of it. In my view, the main thing is that the “will to reference” and the mimetic aim still exist—or, more precisely, that “relational” mimesis abides (cf. Karkama 1988, 243; 1994, 266). This means that phenomena and characters are after all viewed and depicted in explicit relation to history, society, and a close circle of people. Characters are presented in connections that were/are possible, even probable, in the actual world. It is this maintenance of relationality, typical of all realism, that separates postrealism from postmodernism, although it makes use of some devices that are usually regarded as postmodern (such as overt metafiction and parody).

This critical realism that incorporated new devices, however, was not to everyone’s liking in the 1970s. Rightwing critics were receptive to Salama’s novel, but on the left, it raised a polemical debate—thanks to already existing differences. Since the mid-1960s there had been a major conflict on the left and inside the Communist Party of Finland (SKP). The party was led by the Eurocommunist Aarne Saarinen, who had begun to modernize the party line, but a minority of members rejected this and accused the SKP leadership of revisionism. The pro-Soviet internal opposition group was also known as “Taistoists,” after their leader Taisto Sinisalo. Those literary critics who supported Saarinen mainly welcomed Salama’s book, as did a majority of Social-Democratic and right-wing critics. The humanity of the character-narrators—with all their weaknesses—and the structure of the novel were praised. The Taistoist critics, in contrast, along with some veterans of the resistance movement, rejected the novel and publicly expressed their disappointment. Siinä näkijä missä teki jää, they claimed, was untruthful and pessimistic. The communist veterans stressed that actual members of the anti-fascist resistance were not as quarrelsome, deceitful, or indeed vile as portrayed by Salama. Younger Taistoists, for their part, considered the novel bad because it did not follow the pattern of socialist realism (see Peltonen 2008, 191–94).

The heyday of Taistoism did not last long; it was over by the mid-1970s. But many artists, writers, intellectuals, university students, and cultural workers had been committed to its Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism from the late 1960s onwards. For a while, Taistoism held a relatively significant position in Finnish culture. Socialist realism became a guiding principle for the Kulttuurityöntekijäin
Liitto (KTL; Cultural workers union) that was established in 1972. Socialist realism, with its revolutionary romance and proletarian heroes, was implemented whole-heartedly, especially in the visual arts. In literature, it was less popular, but Kalevi Seilonen came close to it with his *Vastarintaryhmä* (Resistance group, 1974), a kind of counter-novel to *Siinä näkijä missä tekijä*. *Vastarintaryhmä* is a documentary work based on interviews with members of the resistance movement in the Tampere area. It gives a more positive picture of wartime communists than Salama does. At the time, Seilonen was an active Taistoist, whereas Salama occupied a more general left-wing position and kept away from the Communist Party and the KTL. While he did belong to the Finnish People’s Democratic League (SKDL) in the 1970s, he never participated in its political practices (Harakka 1986, 99, 168).

The leftwing schism of the 1970s is actually clearly visible in *Siinä näkijä missä tekijä*, especially in the conflict between Maija and her adult son, Harri. Maija is an obvious Taistoist, accusing Harri of playing the role of a Saarinen supporter but actually not being a communist at all. To her, Harri is “a Social Democrat, or even worse” (Salama 1972, 71). This opposition was replicated in the reception of the novel. Salama, who was already well known as a working-class and anti-bourgeois author, was resented by members of his own class, unlike the first battle over his first book, *Juhannustanssit* (1964), where the disapproval came from the right. *Siinä näkijä missä tekijä* represented the working class as a disorganized group, but in fact the novel reflected the actual situation of 1970s Finland. The same lack of cohesion was present in the overall structure of the novel. As Salama himself has said concerning his ideas of reshaping realistic literature, the novel takes the form of its own era (cf. Harakka 1986, 13).

**Conclusion**

Hannu Salama is one of the few older working-class authors still alive in Finland. But as much as left-wing critics have been in disagreement about Salama as a “proper” working-class author, Salama’s own attitude toward the same concept has also been contradictory. On the one hand, the title of “working-class author” has felt too restrictive to him, as it did to Väinö Linna in his time—as though a writer should be content with merely serving as a positive mouthpiece for the class into which one is born. Yet Salama has been willing to depict proletarian life and to criticize the capitalist system. He has even placed himself on the continuum of Finnish working-class writers, such as Toivo Pekkanen, Olavi Siippainen, Lauri Viita, and Väinö Linna (Salama 1996). Foreign influences in turn have come from many directions,
including Dostoyevsky, Balzac, Camus, Sartre, and Strindberg (Tarkka 1973, 61, 99). In the case of Siinä näkijä missä tekijä, another writer who should be mentioned is the American modernist William Faulkner (e.g., The Sound and the Fury, 1929; Ääni ja vimma, 1965), along with the Irish novelist Joyce Cary (The First Trilogy, 1941–44), and the Indian-born British author Lawrence Durrell (The Alexandria Quartet, 1957–60). The work of these three writers offered Salama ideas for the polyphonic and multilayered structure of his own novel (Tarkka 1973, 99, 250). In Finnish working-class fiction, that was something completely new.

Salama occupies an important place in Finnish literature both as a pioneer of postrealism and for his role in the development of working-class prose. Although postrealism is not a widely recognized literary trend globally, in addition to Finland, it has been discussed at least in the context of British literature and of contemporary Russian literature. In Britain, postrealism is said to refer to a kind of novel that is grounded both in some previous text and in the “real world” (empirical past and present). According to Eileen Williams-Wanquet (2006, 393–94), this kind of double rooting occurs in Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) and in Marina Warner’s Indigo (1992). These writers also use metafiction to make a moral and political comment (Williams-Wanquett 2006, 413), similarly to Finnish postrealism. In Russia, realism staged a comeback in the 1990s, but partly in a form that mixes realism and postmodernism, as in the works of Viktor Pelevin. Postrealism is one of the suggested terms for this new trend since the writers (ab)use in particular the traditions both of classic Russian realism and of the socialist realism of the Soviet period (see Marsh 2007, 95). At the same time, postrealism attempts to comprehend the chaos surrounding human beings in our time. Finnish postrealism presumably has interesting similarities to this Russian trend, but the connections are yet to be studied.

Today Hannu Salama lives in Helsinki and continues to write. His latest novel, Hakemisen riemu: Harri Salmisen luistelmia (Joy of searching: Skatings of Harri Salminen), came out in 2014. As the subtitle suggests, it tells mainly about Salminen’s life, but it also invents a parodic story of Jesus. As a novel grounded both in the empirical world (Hannu Salama’s own life) and in a previous text (The New Testament), it carries on the developments of Finnish postrealism.

**References**


Reshaping Finnish Working-Class Prose


———. 1972. Siinä näkijä missä tekijä [Where there’s a crime, there’s a witness]. Helsinki: Otava.
———. 1980. In Miten kirjani ovat syntyneet 2 [How my books were born 2], edited by Ritva Haavikko, 305–12. Helsinki: WSOY.


Abstract
Arto Salminen wrote his six novels in the context of the neoliberal turn in Finland. They were a response to the rapid growth of the power of capital over labor. Salminen’s thematization of neoliberal class difference and the supporting ideological conditions is intense. The aesthetic and literary representations (most notably, the figure of the dirty class) by which Salminen politicizes the world and subjectivities of the working class are ambivalent in their ironic tone, yet always compassionate on the deeper thematic level of his texts. Modifying the critical ethos of social realism with some naturalist and modernist influences of style, his novels are among the most important and original works of art in the field of the contemporary Finnish novel.

Background: The Neoliberal Turn
Since the late 1990s, several Finnish writers have put class difference under serious scrutiny; class has re-emerged in Finnish literature. One of the key writers was Reko Lundán (1969–2006), who became popular with his realistic novels and plays about ordinary people and families in trouble. The novels of Kari Hotakainen (b. 1957) share many of the same realistic aims, yet his narrative tone is distinctively tragicomic in referring to the experience of the structural change in production. Juha Seppälä (b. 1956), in turn, uses both modernist and postmodernist literary tools in representing the historical trajectories and antagonisms of capitalism in Finland. Maarit Verronen (b. 1965) has applied the genre of dystopia in thematicizing the
class effects of neoliberal commodification. Outi Alm (b. 1963), Hanna Marjut Marttila (b. 1961), and Jani Saxell (b. 1972) share a compassion for those on the outskirts of the newly born class society. Yet it was Arto Salminen (1959–2005) who wrote, in his six novels, the angriest critique of neoliberal inequality, commodification, and social fragmentation.

The Finnish society of these writers’ youths was very different from the Finland of today, or that of the 1990s. Their ethical, sometimes openly political, sense of the world is colored by many kinds of social formations, yet I find it obvious that all of them carry some traits of the project of the welfare state. The Finnish welfare state was built after the Second World War in accordance with the Nordic social-democratic model, especially from the 1960s to the 1980s. The literary personification of the project was Väinö Linna (1920–92), the “national writer” of the era, a progressive realist who made public the wounds and inequalities of the first half of the twentieth century; there was a need to recognize the social contradictions, particularly the antagonism between capital and labor, which had been a fuel for the civil war in 1918. Moreover, for Linna, the target was not the nation in itself, as in nationalism, but a society in which a decent life and equal basis for all would be guaranteed by the means of public education and institutionalized solidarity (see Varpio 2006, 651).

The spirit of the welfare state did not retain its hegemony for many decades. From the 1980s onward, Finland has clearly been a part of a political-economic transformation, a global and local adaptation to market-oriented rationality. Even though the idea of welfare for all was not totally abandoned, Finland became a “society of competitiveness” (Heiskala and Luhtakallio 2006), in the political practice of which the instruments of producing wealth in capitalist terms tend to surreptitiously grow into ends in themselves.

Globally, the neoliberal turn began in the late 1970s. Consisting of transnational capitalist processes and a series of political decisions, it gave rise to new class-like formations, “a super-rich class existing alongside middle-class insecurities and the poverty of the underclass” (Haseler 2000, 64). For the Marxist geographer David Harvey, neoliberalization has been “accumulation by dispossession” with four main features: (1) privatization and commodification of public assets; (2) financialization; (3) the management and manipulation of crises; and (4) state redistribution, meaning that the state becomes an agent of the upward redistribution of wealth (2005, 159–65). These redistributive effects, which increase social inequality,
writes Harvey, “have in fact been such a persistent feature of neoliberalization as to be regarded as structural to the whole project” (16).

In Finland, there was a great economic depression during the first half of the 1990s, and this crisis proved to be a “shock” (cf. Klein [2007] 2008) during which neoliberalism was institutionalized. Unemployment grew from a little over 3 percent in 1990 to almost 17 in 1994; in 2000, it was still around 10 percent; during the last ten years the official (trimmed) rate has stayed around 8 percent (Tilastokeskus 2013). In the labor market, short-term jobs have become very common, and the stable jobs which the workers could previously assume as “owned,” as if their positions belonged to them, have become rarities (Siltala 2004). Meanwhile, capital has enjoyed liberation from the strains of progressive taxation; since the tax reform of 1993, a flat tax rate of investment income has improved the economic position of the wealthiest in comparison to other classes.

In 1995—the year Arto Salminen’s first novel was published—the income and wealth gaps began to widen significantly, most rapidly between 1995 and 2000. The uppermost income decile accumulated possessions, while the number of the relatively poor grew; from 1994 to 1998 it almost doubled (Ulusitalo 2000, 2002; Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriön hallinnonala vuonna 2003, 30). If we take into comparison 2005, the year Salminen died, we can see that the portion of Finnish households with poor income (i.e., those with less than half of the median income of all households in Finland) had still kept on growing: 7.3 percent of the entire population in 1995; 10.4 in 2000; 12.3 in 2005. The portion of the relatively poor still remained smaller than in many other European countries, or certainly in the United States. Yet speaking of class difference, it was not a good sign that in just ten years the number of Finnish children under eighteen living in these poor households grew remarkably, from 5 percent (of all children) to 12. Also, whereas the growth of real income (income after adjusting for inflation) of a one-person household was 1,400 euros in the bottom decile, it was 19,500 euros in the uppermost decile—that is fourteen times greater pure growth. All in all, in 2007, the level of differences in income had returned to the level of the early 1970s (Tilastokeskus 2007; Ruotsalainen 2011).

1 For Harvey, neoliberalization has been a global class attack against labor. The powers of trade unions and other working-class institutions have been diminished. As a result, an individualized and relatively powerless worker “confronts a labor market in which only short-term contracts are offered on a customized basis. Security of tenure becomes a thing of the past [. . .]. The second prong of attack entails transformations in the spatial and temporal co-ordinates of the labor market. [. . .] the geographical mobility of capital permits it to dominate a global labor force whose own geographical mobility is constrained” (Harvey 2005, 168–69).
It was precisely in this context of the neoliberal turn that class re-emerged into Finnish literature and Arto Salminen wrote his novels. His works were a response to the rapid growth of the power of capital; in other words, to the re-intensification of the antagonism between capital and labor. In this article I study the thematization of neoliberal class difference, the ideological conditions supporting it, and the aesthetic of Salminen in politicizing the world and subjectivities of the working class.

**Class as Capitalistic, Cultural, and Displaced**

Before taking a closer look at the novels of Salminen, some contemporary theoretical challenges have to be made clear. I tend to remind myself that for a literary scholar, the new emergence of class as a theme of Finnish literature from circa 1998 onward may seem even more dramatic than it actually was in literature itself. This is because during the 1990s there was little mention of class and capitalism on the part of literary critics or researchers in literary and cultural studies (as the question of capitalism was rarely asked, many of the possible answers were left without attention). The dismissal of class perspective and the critique of capitalism occurred simultaneously with the neoliberal turn; the connection has been later noted by many, including Marxist literary scholars (Day 2001; Eagleton 1997) and feminist sociologists (Skeggs 2004, 45; Tyler 2008, 20). For many years, the dismissal was cemented by such postmodern theoretical assumptions that valued the cultural over the economic and that were interested in floating signifiers instead of social structures (see Eagleton 1997). The post-structuralist frame of reference which many scholars worked with was quite suspicious of the idea of a “whole” (cf. capitalism as any kind of “basis,” or the concept of “social totality” in Marxist thinking), and therefore of analysis related to class and the economic structure of society (Day 2001, 198–203). The emancipatory interest of literary and cultural researchers was practiced mainly in the frames of identity politics—the politics of cultural recognition.

According to the feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser, the politics of recognition concentrates on cultural difference and injustice (cultural domination, non-recognition, disrespect, misrecognition, or misframing) produced through social action and cultural representation (1997; 2000). The problem was that the politics of redistribution was not given enough attention. For example, when gaps in income and wealth widened significantly in Finland after the economic depression of the 1990s, analyses of identity politics were relatively narrow responses to the experiences of debt traps and neoliberal commodification and fragmentation of labor (Ojajärvi 2011, 68). A politics of redistribution was needed to pay attention to
the socioeconomic injustices (exploitation, economic marginalization, deprivation) rooted in the political-economic structure of society (see Fraser 1997; 2000).

The Finnish novel, for its part, was already pointing to this situation in the late 1990s (Ojajärvi 2006; 2012). In our literary and cultural studies, however, it took years until neoliberal capitalism and class difference were commonly recognized as being among the major topics. However, during the last ten years we have finally seen a new increase in class research. An important conception has been the notion of “intersectionality,” which has been employed in feminist studies as a key to the dynamics between gender and other differences, such as class. According to the feminist theory of intersectionality, social patterns of inequality are interrelated and also bound together intracategorically in the construction of subjectivities (McCall 2005). Along these lines of thought, class and the structural determinants of social experience under capitalism are now taken more seriously. The post-Bourdieuian, feminist work of Beverley Skeggs (2004), focusing on the cultural and affective construction of class difference, has been very influential in Finland, as is obvious in cultural studies (e.g., Kivimäki 2008; Pajala 2008) and literary history (Malmio 2008; Launis 2009) alike. Yet even if class has become a study topic again, the conceptual tools in considering it may still emphasize the cultural; the analytical frame of the politics of recognition is still applied as the major theoretical frame of reference, even when speaking about class. In the practice of cultural studies, this may result in the reification of classes as identity categories, and seeing class mainly as an identity category may then restrict political imperatives to claiming equal recognition to “class identities” (for example, “tastes”) instead of an analytical (say, Marxist) disclosure of the possibility of transforming the economic structure of society.

To avoid such an uncritical scholarly attitude, the cultural dimension of class and other relations of inequality should be bound more closely with the analysis of contemporary capitalism. Even if the articulation of relationships of domination still includes some traces of previous modes of economic production (cf. Pawling 2004, Kindle p. 29–30/242) and of the pre-neoliberal welfare state, capitalism is by far the dominant way of organizing the economy and the primary context of class. Any analytical view on class should, at some level, include not just the cultural and affective point of view but also a systematic interest in the central functions

---

2 In an analogous way, Richard Gunn has criticized mainstream sociology of seeing the working, middle, and capitalist class as clearly divided categories, whereas his Marxist position would emphasize the contradiction of labor and capital as a dynamic that occurs not just in between but also within the classes and class subjects (1987). As a social scientific study based on the latter view, see Mäkinen 2012.
of capitalism: capital, the antagonism between capital and labor, the market, consumerism, commodification, reification, and ideology. Of course, it is a very difficult methodological challenge to reconsider both the politics of recognition and the politics of redistribution by relating them to each other. Fraser’s advice is to analyze social categories always as “bivalent,” both socioeconomic and cultural, for in the everyday the symbolic and economic injustices (of capitalism, ethnicity, racialization, and gender) “are usually interimbricated so as to reinforce each other dialectically” (1997, 15), far from being two airtight separate spheres. Especially under neoliberalization, notes the political philosopher Lois McNay (interviewed by Ojajärvi and Pyykkönen 2008), the material and symbolic dimensions of power are ever more complexly intertwined.

In my interpretation of Arto Salminen’s novels, I hope to make clear the socioeconomic context, yet simultaneously shed light on the share of the symbolic (i.e., cultural with affective connotations) in the construction of neoliberal inequalities: capitalistic class difference is produced in socioeconomic but also in cultural, affective, and intersectional ways. Studying the thematization of neoliberal capitalism, class, and subjectivities, I will (after a very short introductory overview on Salminen’s works) consider the crucial metaphors and theses in his oeuvre: neoliberalism as class war; the media as an ideological apparatus; the re-intensified commodification of labor as instrumentalization of people and humanity; and the body and the self as symptomatic sites of class struggle. The hypothesis to which I then turn is related to the displacement of class. In Salminen, the antagonism of capitalism and labor is often open and explicit, yet simultaneously he thematizes it as something which is covertly inscribed on the subjectivities and acts of the people of the lower classes, especially. Class may thus come in disguise: veiled, like the return of the repressed.3 It is symptomatically hidden in bodies, fractured selves, and social

---

3 For the late Sigmund Freud, repression is an unconscious act in which the self is defending itself from anxiety (Frosh 2002, 23). The other side of repression is the return of the repressed; that is, the exiled material seeps through in veiled expressions, in projections or (in post-Freudian terms) projective identifications, in displaced judgments, and such. The repressed is dynamic; when repressing something, we do not actually get rid of it; repression is an active process of keeping something unconscious. This conception is helpful in building a heuristic tool for grasping a certain social and affective phenomenon: the return of the repressed class antagonism. Moreover, it is reasonable to suppose that whereas the class antagonism is primarily socioeconomic, its symptomatic return is likely to be merely symbolic at first. Thus, the post-Freudian notion of repression as a part of the relational and affective construction of the self can be turned into a model of a conception which mediates the material and symbolic levels of social inequalities (see McNay 2004, on the need for such mediating conceptions which take into account the concrete experience).
and cultural distinctions. The most remarkable, ironic, and ambivalent vehicle of Salminen in representing this displacement is the figure of the “dirty class.” Finally, I will conclude by summarizing some important aspects of the aesthetic and the political ethos in Salminen’s texts.

The Works of Salminen

Arto Salminen began his career in 1995 with a novel about workers in an asylum center (Turvapaikka, Asylum). An increasing number of immigrants and refugees, especially Somalian, had come to Finland in the early 1990s, and the novel represents realistically the fears and often racist sentiments of the Finns. In some of the key scenes, it also seeks to elicit empathy towards the refugees.

– Nobody seems to understand that the refugees are neither devils nor angels. They are human beings, says Hynynen.
– They are not human beings. They used to be. Now they are refugees.4

The Somalian refugees are thematized as people who have previously been worth something in their native context; now they are merely things at the shelves of a warehouse. Referring to Salminen’s evolving methodology in studying the nature of social relations in capitalism, which we will later become familiar with, was this already a political mapping—a slightly unconscious mapping—of the position of not just the asylum seekers but also the Finnish working class? Earlier on, another conversation reflects upon the projective, instrumental “value” that different groups of people have in different contexts. It ends in the remark “Negroes are Finns” (Salminen 1995, 75) by the refugee center worker Sundqvist, which implies that in some sense the position of a “Negro”—or, someone who used to be a human yet is now merely a worthless refugee—is shared by people like him.5

The novels that followed proved that Turvapaikka was the beginning of a thorough critique of the instrumentalization of people and humanity. Varasto (The storage), published in 1998, situates warehouse workers as the very lowest of all:

4  “– Kukaan ei tunnu tajuavan sitä että pakolaiset ei ole piruja eikä enkeleitä. Ne on ihmisä, sanoi Hynynen.
– Ei ne ole ihmisä. Ne oli ihmisä. Nyt ne on pakolaisia.” (Salminen 1995, 101. Translation by Olli Löytty, whose forthcoming article studies the novel from a postcolonial, transnational point of view. Other citations from the novels have been translated by me.)
5  In this conversation, a Somalian refugee thinks about how he used to have a value as a human being, yet now he has been reduced to the position of a “Negro” in racist discourse.
– Raninen and Rousku, are you down there? (italics in the original)
– One cannot get any lower, I said.
– Take five 20-litre cans of Kivitex to Huuskonen’s car.
– Okey, I said.
– Damn, said Raninen, but so quietly that even he himself did not hear it.6

The next novel, *Paskateoria* (The shit theory, 2001), in turn, is about lower middle-class media workers and the nihilism of the yellow press. *Ei-kuori* (The no envelope, 2003) has a taxi-driver as its protagonist. The novel begins with a powerful metaphor: Urkki is driving on the highway and sees how, in front of him, a pair of hooves falls out from the bottom of a horse trailer:

The shower of sparks seemed to end slowly. Horseshoes are soft iron. On the spring’s raw asphalt they do not last long. Next the road will rend the hooves. Looking carefully at the asphalt, I think I already saw two white lines.7

Near the end of *Ei-kuori*, the fallen racehorse is juxtaposed to Roope Tanttu, a grotesque, falling star of the culture industry: “The heads of the shoes scratched the ground, leaving two tenuous trails on the asphalt.”8 Neoliberal subjects are racehorses.

In his last two novels, *Lahti: Hupailu* (Slaughter: A comedy, 2004) and *Kalavale: Kansalliseepos* (An epic lie: A national epos, 2005), Salminen wrote about characters from lower or business classes. He continued criticizing neoliberal competition and the instrumentalizing discourses of the market and the media.

In Salminen’s obituary, his editor Harri Haanpää (2005) compared him to the Finnish writers Pentti Haanpää (1905–55) and Elmer Diktonius (1896–1961), an advanced realist and a leftist modernist, respectively. Interestingly, he also regarded Salminen, the writer of “moralities for our time,” as a relative to Horace McCoy.

6 “– Raninen ja Rousku, oletteko te siellä alhaalla?
– Alemmas ei pääse, minä sanoin.
– Viekkää viisi kaksikymppistä Kivitexiä Huuskosen autoon.
– Viedään, minä sanoin.
– Perkele, sanoi Raninen, mutta niin hiljaa, että se ei kuullut sitä itsekään.” (Salminen 1998, 12)
7 “Kipinäsuihku alkoi jo talttua. Hevosenkengät ovat meltoa rautaa. Äkkiä ne kuluvat kevätkarkeaa asfalttia vasten. Seuraavaksi tie alkaa raastaa kavioita. Katsoin tarkasti asfaltin pintaa ja olin näkevinäni kaksi valkoista vanaa.” (Salminen 2003, 6)
8 “Kengänkärjet raapivat maata. Asfalttiin jäi kaksi hentoa vanaa.” (Salminen 2003, 145)
(1897–1955), the author of They Shoot Horses, Don’t They? (1935), and McCoy’s contemporary Nathanael West (1903–40), both of whose works have been seen as a response to the Great Depression in the United States.

Writing after the depression of the 1990s and the neoliberal turn in Finland, Salminen was a satiric social realist who was praised early on by some critics, yet long neglected by the mainstream media. Thus, he was also relatively unknown to most of the reading public during his lifetime. For many years, he financed his writing by jobs such as carrying newspapers and driving a taxi; he did not receive any significant grants until the last third of his career. His sudden death, as well as the play Varasto (2005), which he had adapted from his second novel and which premiered soon after his death, made him better known. Later on, the movie Varasto (The Storage, 2011; directed by Taru Mäkelä, manuscript by Veli-Pekka Hänninen) made his name even more familiar to the public. It must be said, however, that the movie has a much lighter tone than the novel. The movie is, in fact, somewhat ideological in its “positive” ending, which is surely comfortable to the middle-class audience but does not do justice to the critical attitude of Salminen.

**Neoliberalism as War, the Media as Ideological Apparatus**

To respond clearly to the neoliberal turn, Salminen often lets some of his characters speak about the societal situation:

– They are going to eliminate the working class completely, he said.
– They say it is a depression now, so the proud and civilized and organized worker is being dumped into pig shit up to his neck, and then left there, in the name of competitiveness. Instead, now there are the working poor, just like in America.⁹

This kind of open contextualization, pointing out the re-intensified antagonism of capital and labor, is the most common in Salminen’s work. Yet it should be noted that in narration such class-consciousness tends to be framed merely as residual. The character Jylhäkorpi in Varasto cited here is an old communist, a relic, and he, too, thinks that class-consciousness is a thing of the past:

---
⁹ “– Työväenluokka aiotaan hävittää kokonaan, se sanoi. – Semmonen ylpeä ja sivistynyt ja järjestäytynyt duunari poljetaan kaulaa myötä sianpaskaan ja sanotaan, että nyt on lama. Ja sinne se jätetään, kilpailukyyyn nimissä. Tilalle on tullut työssäkävän köyhälistö, ihan niin kuin Amerikassa.” (Salminen 1998, 86)
The labor union is a curse word. The whole nation has been taught to hate it. The union is conservative and rigid, that’s what they say on the telly every day. And the lesson is best learnt by those who cannot manage without the union. Go and ask the poorest cashier girl in Maxi in Kannelmäki if she is in the union.10

Another good example of Salminen’s habit of creating social contextualization through the conversations between characters can be found in Paskateoria:

– The income differences are enormous nowadays, I said.
– How did it happen?
– It didn’t just happen, Juurakko [the main editor of the paper] said.
– It was wanted and made to happen. Society is better than ever. Look out of that window and you’ll see a lively city. People are richer than in most countries. They are buying a hell of a lot. Yes I know, the slums of the eastern side are full of shit and blood, yet everybody knows that. It’s not any news. [. . .]
– I have news, said the chief sports editor. – Real news.
– Tell us, Juurakko said.
– The goalkeeper of Jokerit is gay. He confesses.
– Brilliant! Juurakko shouted. That’s our headline! We are defending the oppressed and the minorities. Aren’t we, Suurnäkki?11

The new class differences and segregation are “not any news” to the people of the middle class, yet they concentrate on consumption. Class difference is a fact, yet simultaneously it is kept out of consciousness. The editors themselves see the class

11  “– Tuloerot on nykyään ihan mielettömät, minä sanoin. – Miten tähän on jouduttu?
– Mullä on uutinen, sanoi Juurakko. – Kerro heti, sanoi Juurakko.
– Jokerien maalivahti on homo. Se tunnustaa.
difference, yet cynically they act to gain profit, or they concentrate on living their last day in the middle class.

– The middle class is not safe anymore. The propertied class owns everything, except the working class, which it does not want to own anymore, as it is worthless. They have abandoned it like an old shovel or worn-out mitts. They continue to own the middle class, and the middle class owns nothing but its fear.12

In most of the novels, neoliberal capitalism is juxtaposed to war. Varasto compares the neoliberal turn to 1918 “but just without guns” (“mutta aseita ei käytetä”) (Salminen 1998, 29). The means of war are ideological. And because of that, the radical antagonism between capital and labor occurs not just between classes but also within the working class and their selves. The voice of a fellow worker on the phone giving orders is “like shots of an execution company” (“kuin teloituskompanian laukaukset”). Raninen, one of the men, carries—inexplicably—a “big dog shit” (“suuri koiranpaska”) in his hands and afterwards “watches them like they were his enemies” (“katseli niitä kuin vihollisia”) (Salminen 1998, 53, 10–11). Jylhäkorpi states: “This is war time. If someone gets a shot in the head, a brother in arms rips his stomach open with a knife and takes the soup for better purposes while it’s still warm.”13 The text varies the metaphor of war by referring to commodification: commodities on the shelves of the storage are “like an army division taking a break” (“kuin sotaväen osasto tauolla”) (Salminen 1998, 10). The central logic of capitalism, which has been liberated from its limits set by the welfare state (see Salminen 1998, 108–10) and which is crucially global (2004, 117), is represented as the background for “war time.”

The common denominator shared by war and the market is instrumental rationality. In Lahti, an army officer speaks:

– Customer satisfaction, he said. – That’s the key word. That’s where we are strong, even if it costs us. For the physical transport of the product we have a fast and reliable distribution channel, which has been engineered

12 “– Ei täällä ole enää keskiluokka turvassa. Omistava luokka omistaa kaiken, paitsi työväenluokan. Sitä ne ei enää halua omistaa, koska se ei ole minkään arvoinen. Ne on hylänneet sen kuin ruostuneen lapion tai puhikikuluneet näppylähanskat. Mutta keskiluokan ne omistaa eikä keskiluokka omista muuta kuin pelkonta.” (Salminen 2001, 50)
13 “Tää on sota-aikaa. Jos joku saa napin otsaan, niin aseveli repii siltä puukolla mahan auki ja ottaa sopan talteen kun se vielä on lämmintä.” (Salminen 1998, 159)
Commodification has no inner logic that would set limits to its technical-economic rationality; in principle, the dead can be labeled as “the product” which the church then delivers back to the home front. This kind of impoverished rationalization is the essence of instrumental rationality and was well known by the old philosophers of the Frankfurt School (see Adorno and Horkheimer [1947] 2002), who came to their conclusion in the context of fascism and capitalist modernity before the social-democratic rise of the welfare state. Salminen draws the same conclusion in a post-welfare-state situation, where people become racehorses worn-out by the ever-forward movement of capital. As an angry realist, he throws his view into the faces of his readers—it seems as though the implied writer of the texts (the hypothetical consciousness behind the texts) supposes that people who read are middle-class and need to be slapped awake (on Salminen’s views on the state of the literary field, cf. Haanpää 2005). The novels behave almost in a manner of British in- yer-face theatre of the 1990s, which was a reaction to consumerism, Thatcherism, and neoliberal Third Way ideology of the latter-day Labour Party (Alanen 2008; Buchler 2008; Sierz 2001).

The options of the working class, in Salminen’s texts, are either to become ideologically drugged unconscious—and “shot” like the intoxicated pigs in Lahti—or, to find new, surprising, possibly illegal positions in “the battle for survival”: “The play-offs are on, people are looking for new positions.”15 Jylhäkorpi and Rousku in Varasto steal from the owner of the storage. The female worker Karita, in turn, knows this and is blackmailing Rousku to marry her, which according to Jylhäkorpi is a perfectly understandable way of coping in the new situation: “Housewife is a very respectable title in comparison to long-term unemployed [. . . ]. Nowadays planning a family is a part of the social game” (Salminen 1998, 88; on respectability, cf. Skeggs 2004). 16 In contrast to these three, Raninen follows conventional rules.

15 “Pudotuspeli on käynnissä, ihmiset hakee uusia asemia.” (Salminen 1998, 28)
16 “Perheenemääntä on ihan kunniallinen titteli jos sitä vertaa pitkäaikaistyöttöön. Se on sosialista peliä nykyään koko perhesuunnittelu.” (Salminen 1998, 88)
Comically, he even tries to write the lotto numbers to his coupon “in the exact order they will come from the lottery machine” (“siinä järjestyksessä kun ne koneesta tulee”) (Salminen 1998, 59–60; see also 121). He does not receive a prize for his dog-like obedience; he gets the blame for “stealing,” which he never did, and gets fired. In Salminen, the new positions in class battle make the working-class subjects turn against their fellows. Class as a consciousness based on solidarity does not exist anymore. In light of Salminen’s later novels, we may regard this as a realization of the divide et impera rule of neoliberalism. For the rulers, it even seems safe to let the underclasses “have their own armies. It is each other they will shoot anyway.”

The role of the media, especially of the yellow press and television, is to prevent class-consciousness from developing. Jylhäkorpi, again, crystalizes the logic which can then be found represented in Salminen’s later novels: “The television clergy [...] spreads a hell of a negative picture of income redistributions and the welfare state. That propaganda is so successful that the firmest believers are the poor.” This notion of the media is repeated in the basic plot structure of Kalavale, and before that in Paskateoria: “Society has become such that nobody is allowed to know anything and entertainment must never cease.”

Kalavale brings together Salminen’s metaphor of war and his notion of media as a propaganda machine. Class war is represented as a hidden ideological state of mind, into which the commercial media as an ideological apparatus (see Althusser [1970] 2014) “hails” or “interpellates” subjects (citizens). The novel describes a reality TV show which resembles Big Brother: a closed house, a group of people obeying orders, and an audience voting out the losers. The competitors come from the lower classes; they are referred to as “the unemployed of the second generation” (“toisen polven työttömiä”) (Salminen 2005, 36). The show is titled “Auschwitz,” and the people are divided into guards and prisoners. Every now and then one of the guards loses his or her status and becomes a prisoner, or the other way round. The practical way of governing here is again to “divide and rule,” which Salminen represents as the crucial way in which neoliberal hegemony is maintained.

---

17 “Annetaan niiden perustaa omat armeijansa ihan rauhassa. Toisaan ne ampuu kumminkin.” (Salminen 2001, 81)
18 “Telkkarisääty [...] levittää helvetin negatiivista kuvaa tulonsiirroista ja hyvinvointivaltiosta. Se on niin onnistunutta propagandaa, että parhaiten sitä uskoo köyhät.” (Salminen 1998, 162–63)
19 “Yhteiskunta on mennyt semmoiseksi, että kukaan ei saa tietää mitään eikä vihde saa loppua kesken.” (Salminen 2001, 115)
The audience may of course vote, for it is a “new democracy” (“uutta demokratiaa”): “The one who has the most money, has the most votes.” As a climax, there is a competition in which the last competitors (that is, unpaid workers) in the show may choose the amount of electricity that they will receive in an electric chair. Thus, Salminen represents the neoliberal intensification of the antagonism between capital and labor as a sado-masochistic reality show. The show offers a delusional opportunity to become recognized in the society of competitiveness—just like its real-life equivalents from *The Weakest Link* (see Ojajärvi 2001) to *The Apprentice* and *Fear Factor* (see Prosono 2008), or, indeed, like the dance marathon in *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?* by Horace McCoy. The title of Salminen’s novel—referring to a lie—predicts what happens next. The winner, Herlevi, finds out that while he was electric-shocking himself, the rules of the game had changed. The willingness to adapt oneself to the rules does not make one a winner or anything, since the power to set and change the rules lies elsewhere.

The title and the subtitle, *Kalavale: Kansalliseepos* (An epic lie: A national epos) involve a play with words, referring to the *Kalevala*. Yet this is a thematic thesis as well: here is a new national narrative, here is a miniature version of Finland. In Salminen’s neoliberal Finland, the citizens have become competitors, and, in the game which they have become a part of, they are politically powerless. In some cases they are also violent (in the end, Herlevi stabs the owner of the TV company); however, even then they remain politically powerless.

**NEOLIBERAL COMMODIFICATION AND FRAGMENTATION**

In his sociological study, Martin Prosono writes about the show *Fear Factor* and makes the following observation:

[B]odies are used to reinforce in the minds of the viewing public simple truths about the social and economic system in which they live. You are basically on your own. It is matter of playing to win even if it means: (1) demoralizing your opponent; (2) demeaning yourself; (3) having to go through particularly rough times; (4) getting no help from others; (5) having literally to swallow garbage; and (6) a combination of all of the aforementioned. (2008, 643)

Whereas *Fear Factor* is a symptom of neoliberal capitalism, Salminen’s novels are an attempt at a diagnosis. This aim is possible in part because those who grew up during

---

20 “Sillä on eniten ääniä, jolla on eniten rahaa.” (Salminen 2005, 160)
the heyday of the welfare state may not, indeed, regard as “natural” the thorough-going commodification of personality and the body; for them, it has not yet become ideologically naturalized, a given state of affairs. In the works of Salminen (and other writers that I mentioned earlier) the welfare state, with its bearable conditions of labor, lives on as literary imagination,21 as a part of the so-called “implied writer” of the text, even if the welfare state is shown in the stories as weakened or even totally broken down.

However, what Salminen’s novels represent as the contemporary state of mind, is the internalization of neoliberal fragmentation and commodification. Salminen’s diagnosis claims that when there no longer seems to be a politically effective way to deal with the antagonism between capital and labor, the antagonism becomes displaced. Now, it is hard for the workers to find any other way of dealing with the antagonism except the “compulsion to repeat” (Freud [1920] 1991, 307) it between or even within themselves—even in their very bodies. They abuse, cheat, and sell one another.22 In Salminen’s world, the social and cultural buffer zones to the instrumental rationality of capitalism (restraints like the welfare state, the family or the media, church or politics as occasional practices of freedom) have been demolished. Social relations resemble buyer–seller relationships and the abuses these can bring, and characteristic cultural mentalities are “What will I get out of that?”23 or, more ironically, “Though I’m old, I’m not useless. I can be abused.”24

Instead of human dignity, people have instrumental value according to the amount of surplus value that can be expropriated from them. This kind of structural instrumentalization colors the intersubjective relations, self-identifications, and focalizations of the characters. Power becomes a sexual matter as well; women use men, and men use women. A telling example of the latter: in Varasto, the male workers throw darts into porn pictures of women, thus projecting “outside” their own position as the subjugated. Those viewed as lower seek what they could view as lower than themselves. The body is a site of projection and competition. Power relations are, literally, embodied (most clearly in the electric chair of “Auschwitz”), although perhaps not in the most extreme manner of Mark Ravenhill’s in-yer-face

22 The plot of Ei-kuori (Salminen 2003) is a variation of the old saying “to sell one’s own granny” (“myydä isoäitinsä”), for the family sells the grandmother’s apartment while she is in the hospital.
23 “Mitä mä siitä hyödyn?” in Ei-kuori (Salminen 2003, 7), as an answer to the question why Urkki did not try to tell the driver in front of him about the horse dropping out of the carriage.
24 “Vaikka mä olen vanha, mä en ole hyödytön. Mua voidaan käyttää hyväksi.” (Salminen 2005, 144)
play *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), in which the climax of commodification and consumerism is a sado-masochistic scene where one of the characters wants to be raped with a knife.

Salminen’s dramatization of the social and affective effects of neoliberalism is a severely realist way of making commodification around us visible. Commodification, in a Marxian sense, refers to the subjection of social reality to the commodity form. Karl Marx ([1867] 1999) himself does not exactly use the term, yet he indeed theorizes its referent (the commodification phenomenon itself), when he analyzes “the commodity-form of the product of labor” as the “cell-form” of capitalism and criticizes the social effects of the form as “alienation” and “commodity fetishism.” As the commodity is basically a form, it is a matter of signification, and thus it may become a general frame of understanding the world. The essences of this form are the seller-buyer relations of the market and the surplus value logic of capital accumulation. After the neoliberal turn, the social reality has been increasingly seen in the light of these two factors. Global neoliberalism has been an intensive phase of commodification, as it has stripped away many of “the protective coverings that embedded liberalism allowed and occasionally nurtured” (Harvey 2005, 168).

This also brings us back to class: the people in the classes Salminen is writing about are treated as commodities. “The storage was like them all,” thinks Rousku of his working mates in *Varasto*. The storage is like their capitalist situation: they are in the same position as the goods in it. In the context of neoliberal capitalism, the workers are the very commodity they must sell, namely, labor. And if their labor power is not valuable anymore (if it does not function as a source of surplus value for the capitalist), they are worthless, “in a storage with a million others. And that storage is for goods which surely do not sell fast.”

What is more, the working-class subjects turn the experience of being worthless and powerless against those in the same or worse situation, or against themselves. The mechanism of capitalist subjection becomes doubled or even tripled. When trying to find a way out, people repeat the same practices of use and abuse that made them feel worthless: they try to take those practices into their control by mastering them, or they try to heal the wounds they have by using the very weapons which made the wounds. In a sense, this is performativity, attempts to repeat

---

25 As a primary analysis of the commodity, see Marx’s *Capital* ([1867] 1999).
26 “Varasto oli kuin kaikki ne.” (Salminen 1998, 10)
27 “[…] varastossa miljoonan muun kanssa. Ja se onkin semmoinen varasto, mistä ei ihan heti tavara kaupaksi mene.” (Salminen 1998, 29)
productively, except that there just is not much benign parody or subversion left in the narrated world—only the plain compulsion to repeat (cf. Butler 1993, 123–24).

The novelistic narration itself, however, is a way of thematizing the neoliberal repetition of commodification and fragmentation. Yet again, for a severe realist like Salminen, that may imply another problem: if one writes about thorough commodification, how can one simultaneously describe it and distance oneself from it while remaining truthful to one’s basic observation that commodification is thorough?

**The Figure of the Dirty Class, or, the Disposable Worker**

The answer in Salminen’s aesthetic seems to be that ambivalence is inscribed on his literary methods. In particular, this relates to the figure of the “dirty class.” Salminen frequently connects the lower classes to dirt, filth, and grotesque bodily materials (the word *kusi* “piss” is used in his works dozens of times).

*Varasto* begins: “I was sitting in the coffee room and cutting my nails. Bits sneered at the table like ten small half moons. I pushed them inside Karita’s cigarettes.” Later, the fingernails become toenails. *Paskateoria* opens with the following lines: “Everyone has their own way: Jasmine farted while fucking.” The focalizer here is one of the lower-middle class journalists of the novel. Later in the novel, he is interviewing a rich old celebrity and sees him urinating: “He had a lewd dick [. . .]. The piss surged with power, yet the wind dispersed the shower. I felt the spray on my face. I licked my lips: salty like seawater.” In the first pages of *Ei-kuori*, in turn, we find the taxi driver thinking about his hemorrhoids and focalizing: “As I was putting the cake in my mouth, I noticed that my fingers smelled like piss.” Even the characters’ own point of view picks out the dirt in themselves. Dirt and its articulation into the body of the working class mark the internalization of neoliberal power relations: I see myself as dirt, for I am dirt.

Obviously, the figure of the dirty class has many thematic functions and meanings, including contradictory ones. A major denotation in the figure is that the dirt carries an implied argument: in this society, these people are seen as dirt, even by themselves (dirt has been internalized into their minds and into their focalization).

---

28  “Istuin kahvihuoneessa ja leikkelin kynsiäni. Irtonaiset kappaleet jäivät pöydälle irvistämään kuin kymmenen pientä puolikuuta. Työnsin ne Karitan tupakoiden sisään.” (Salminen 1998, 7)
29  “Tapansa kullakin: Jasmine pieri nussiessaan.” (Salminen 2001, 5)
31  “Kun vein viineriä suuhuni huomasin, että sormeni haisivat kuselta.” (Salminen 2003, 12)
They are the working class, or what is left of it; they are the living material that has been used in production, and as they have become worthless for that process, what have they become? Material in the wrong place. And that is what dirt is, according to Mary Douglas in her *Purity and Danger* (1966). Salminen’s figure of the dirty class is a literary way of pointing out that under neoliberal commodification and social fragmentation, the figure of the “disposable worker” emerges as prototypical (cf. Harvey 2005, 169). Once workers are no longer needed, they are thrown away like trash.

After this Marxist emphasis, we could try a more Foucauldian (and a slightly Bakhtinian) approach and claim that the power relation represented or produced by the figure in Salminen’s texts is not, however, just one-directional. For Michel Foucault ([1994] 2002), power and resistance are bound together. If that is so, may the dirty, grotesque body become read as a minor sign of resistance? Does Salminen borrow, a bit like people in Bakhtinian carnivalism, the power of the body to subvert the conventional relations of power? As something which is “out of limits,” the figure of the dirty class may signify unpredictability and the hidden possibility of transgression, a revolutionary impulse even; yet to be sure, it must then simultaneously be a sign of a repressed revolution.

Although the subversive power of the image of grotesque body and bodily dirt is a minor one, it may perhaps be interpreted as an image which is distracting to the eyes of a middle-class reader with “good taste.” It is as if the writer were implying: “Look, this is how you (the middle class) see us workers below you—now this text is throwing it back in your face—here it is, in-yr-face, eat it yourself!” Obviously, the interpretation of such an ironic gesture is dependent on the social and ideological subject position of the actual reader. Thus the gesture is deeply ambivalent. The combination of bodily dirt and the working class may become read as if it were only affirming the old stereotype of the dirty workers.

In the early twentieth century, working-class people were often associated with dirt by scientists, as educated citizens were discouraged from coming into contact with the “unwashed masses” (King 2010; see also Skeggs 2004, 4, 104). The linking of dirt and the working class was very common in literature, too. This association was not always a merely negative one. In the Finnish novel, the naturally depicted huckster “Kauppa-Lopo,” by Minna Canth (*Kauppa-Lopo*, 1889), is a well-known example. Canth lets her characters marvel at the ugliness and the dirtiness of Kauppa-Lopo: “The corners of the mouth in snuffy slime, hair tangled
and on her eyes. And those cheeks! They bulged out as dirty grey [. . .].” However, the empathy of the text and the implied writer is more on the side of the seen (in literary terms, the focalized) than on the side of those who look (the focalizers) (see Lappalainen 2000, 209).

Another interesting example is the dirtiness of the poor in Joel Lehtonen’s realist masterpiece *Putkinotko* (1919–20). It represents dirt as a fact of life for a poor rural family living in the “cow parsley dale” (as the title could be translated). The main representative of the bourgeoisie, the shop owner Muttinen, is a neighbor to the dirty family Käkriäinen. The dirt acts as a sign of distance between classes, yet Muttinen also enjoys a bath with the family. Including Muttinen’s onomatopoetic, animal-like moans of joy, the scene is arguably the greatest sauna scene in Finnish literature. Thus, the novel uses dirt as both a representational tool of class difference and as a sign of something that may connect people bodily despite their different classes. The same humanist manner could be applied to the interpretation of Salminen’s figure of the dirty class. By textually foregrounding the body of the working class, the novels may act as an implicit demand for recognition of our common humanity: we all have a body, a somewhat grotesque one, if we take a closer look at it. And if nothing else in this divided world of neoliberal capitalism connects us to each other, perhaps our bodies still offer us a site of mutual recognition—even if the stylish upper classes would eagerly forget that. In Finnish literary history, a slightly more symptomatic example than *Kauppa-Lopo* or *Putkinotko* could be the role of dirt in some of the literary representations by educated writers during the years that followed the Great Strike of 1905. Some of these writers found themselves disappointed, in part because of the rise of the working-class movement: “the people,” previously idealized, suddenly seemed to have their own will; they were loud and not always beautiful. In *Mirdja* (1908), by L. Onerva, the protagonist, who is an artist, tries to feel solidarity with the people, but as she joins a common meeting filled with working-class men and women, she finds herself battling with disgust: “Thick, dirty air penetrated into her eyes, nostrils, and throat; it was the common smell characteristic to the people, which in a blink of an eye opens the view into its harsh and scarce conditions of life: the sweat of work, dirty clothes, tobacco, children [. . .].”

---


33 “Paksu, likainen ilma työntäytyi tukehtavana hänen silmiinsä, sieraimiinsa ja kurkuunsa, tuo kansalle niin ominainen yhteistuoksu, joka yhdessä silmänrääpyksessä avaa näköalat sen karkeisiin ja niukkoihin elämääntoihin: työn hiekeä, likaisia vaatteita, tupakkaa, lapsia [. . .].” (Onerva [1908] (2002), 153–54)
In contemporary media culture, in turn, the idea of the dirty, somewhat disgusting working class is even more symptomatic, though perhaps more hidden, too. Let us think about the figure of “chav” (kind of “white trash”) in British media culture, referring contemptuously to the uneducated manners of white working-class people. The chav figure is “a product of an unequal society” (Jones [2011] 2012, 9), a representation in which the class-consciousness repressed by Thatcherism returns in a symptomatic manner. It is a part of a larger process of “class making,” in which the white upper and middle classes distinguish themselves from the white poor (Tyler 2008, 18). The chav figure can be defined, I would suggest, as a cultural counterpart of the socioeconomic figure of the disposable worker (cf. Harvey 2005, 169). It also seems to me that in such contemporary media representations, the old knitting-together of dirt and the working class is still producing some of the veiled ideological background. In her article “Chav Mum Chav Scum,” Imogen Tyler studies the reactions of disgust characteristic to the emergence of the grotesque and comic figure of the chav and argues that in the media, the young white working-class mothers, for instance, are represented as loud, drunk, fat, and vulgar (as in the television series Little Britain) (2008). In other words, their actions are labeled as disproportionate in many ways. Also, often their performative actions of reaching for symbolic capital of some kind are represented as “failures,” for instance, showing “bad taste” (cf. Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Lawler 2005). It is especially their sexual manners and their attempts to grasp the symbolic capital of the upper classes that tend to be represented as “excessive,” too openly consumerist, or vulgarly gendered (see Lahikainen and Mäkinen 2012; Skeggs 2004). One reason for their “failure” in the eyes of the middle-class public may be that their ideological position is still tied to the old representation of a class of workers with dirty, sweaty, and smelly bodies.

It is in-between such literary and cultural contexts that the reader must interpret Salminen’s figure of the dirty class. And, therefore, this figure is obviously ambivalent as a literary and political tool. On the one hand, there is a danger that the irony of using it remains unrecognized and the combination of the working class and dirt in Salminen’s work just reassures the reader, in a reactionary way, that the stereotype is apt: the poor are filthy, uncivilized, somewhat animalistic, and, therefore, they do not truly deserve a position as equal citizens. Nor can they be regarded as beings with proper human dignity. The actual probability of this interpretation should be evaluated in relation to the changed socioeconomic position of the readers. If their position has become more insecure than before (which is likely on the macro-level, as a result of the neoliberal turn), some readers may
be keen to turn to “projective identification,”34 a psychosocial defense, in their interpretation of Salminen’s ambivalent aesthetic. Projective identification occurs if the readers use Salminen’s figure of dirty class to translate their own economic insecurity in contemporary capitalism into a cultural binary opposition between their threatened middle-class selves and the “disposable” working class. Thus they would be taking Salminen’s figure of dirty class at face value in trying to distance themselves from the neoliberal disposability of workers, whereas the insecurity still would, in fact, remain their own neoliberal disposability (to the extent that they, too, are neoliberal labor). In such projective identification, or to be more precise, projective class identification, the insecurity of the position of the middle class can function ideologically as a catalyst of neoliberalism, translating the socioeconomic antagonism of capital and labor into individualized differences (cf. Lahikainen and Mäkinen 2012; Tyler 2008, 32).

On the other hand, to stop at this possibility of interpretation would be a sloppy misreading of Salminen’s novels. With all their elements described earlier, they obviously do not mean to act as a catalyst to projective class identification. Instead, there are even some metatextual elements which encourage the readers to go beyond the repelling, abjective affects they may experience while reading. The novels call us to read with empathy, and the figure of the dirty class is one of the things which has to be read that way. The description of the suburban social milieu in Paskateoria tells us this:

The wind blew from the direction of the trashcans and carried the smell with two hands, as it was so heavy. The smell was three-dimensional. One could read it with bare fingers, like Braille.

There was a memo of hopelessness written in it [. . .].35

**Poetic Ruptures and the Ethos of Salminen**

Arto Salminen’s novels were often labeled by criticism in newspapers as “excessive realism” (*inhorealismi*). Salminen himself saw this term as an invalidation of his work. In an interview shortly before his death, he claimed that nowadays the

---

34 The concept of projective identification goes back to the object-relations psychoanalysis of Melanie Klein ([1986] 1991, 197–98). It refers to an unconscious communication where the subject forces parts of the self into another person (or, we could add, a representative of a cultural category), who is then expected to become identified with the projected quality of the self (see Frosh 2002, 36–39; Ojajärvi 2006, 192–200).

35 “Tuuli kävi roskalaatikoilta päin ja kantoi löyhkää kaksin käsin kun ei muuten jaksanut. Haju oli kolmiulotteinen. Sitä pystyi lukemaan paljain sormin, kuin pistekirjoitusta. Siihen oli kirjoitettu lohduttomuuden muistilista [. . .].” (Salminen 2001, 6)
“rough naturalism” of real life can be seen everywhere if one does not shut one’s eyes (Hirvasnoro 2005).

As a trace—or a condition of possibility—of another kind of reality, Salminen’s narration applies poetic ruptures that exceed the one-dimensionality of the narrated neoliberal world. Firstly, there are shakings in the sense of space: “The setting dislocated out of joint, I got a strange feeling.”36 “I felt like the forest behind the parking lot was scuttling backward faster than I was able to go forward. It must have been a delusion, or then I was walking faster than I thought.”37 In using such deviations, Salminen is clearly indebted to the modernist Veijo Meri (cf. Tamminen 1996), yet he uses the shakings in the sense of space as part of his realist tendency: to produce a sense of uncertainty, including a hint of threat. Something is jolting the characters in their situations; the bottom might fall or turn upside down; the space around us is moving in unpredictable ways and might change drastically. Are these shakings yet another way of thematizing the effects of the neoliberal turn, or are they tiny reflections of the revolutionary impulses of history? Both, I think. They are a part of the remarkable ambivalence of Salminen’s aesthetic or “cognitive mapping” (see Jameson 1990) of the neoliberal, global capitalism:

– Is there an uprising of people taking place somewhere?
– I don’t know yet, said Pokki, lifting his glasses with his finger. —Yet somewhere on a distant plateau there is a quake. The axis of the earth creaks. You can feel the vibration if you push the seismograph to the ground.

The sun was shining low. It tried to tell us our exact location and our real magnitude. It tried to set the dimensions right, but it could not. Only the shadows grew longer.38

Second, as we can see, the sense of the societal (even global) space is often deepened through nature. “The sun had lured the leaves to grow on the tree, only to discard them in the autumn.”39 “Trees, the slaves of their habits, all leaned in the same direction, even though the wind was carrying pure emptiness from one place

36 “Asetelma keikahtsi sijoiltaan, tuli omituinen olo.” (Salminen 1998, 9)
37 “Parkkialueen takainen metsä tuntui vilistävän taaksepäin nopeammin kuin minä eteenpäin. Sen täytyi olla harha, tai sitten kävelin nopeammin kuin luulin.” (Salminen 2001, 13)
38 “– Onko joku kansannousu tulossa?

Aurinko paistoi matalalta. Se yritti ilmoittaa meille tarkan paikkamme ja oikean kokomme. Se yritti asettaa mittasuhteet kohdalleen, mutta ei pystynyt. Varjot vain pitenivät.” (Salminen 2001, 149)
39 “Aurinko oli houkutellut lehdet puuhun hylätäkseen ne syksyllä.” (Salminen 2005, 235)
I would call these poetic, nature-oriented deviations distinctively lyrical ruptures. They resemble poetry (at least in the context of Salminen’s prose, which consists mostly of a more straight-forward language). These moments in narration may describe the society as it is in its neoliberal condition, yet as lyrical, foregrounded language, they also exceed the empirical consciousness of the character-focalizers and the one-dimensionality of instrumentalized neoliberal capitalism. The ruptures are poetic resistance, a sign of the possibility to articulate the social world in other ways than by instrumental means. The harshness of commodified relations under neoliberalism is not yet all there is; there is a possibility of a different way of seeing things, of a different kind of discourse.

Third, Salminen’s abundant use of personification may both represent and interrupt the one-dimensionality of the narrated world:

The living room floor was full of empty wine bottles. Every one of them was lying down with mouth open, except one. It was standing in the front of the crowd with a cork in its head and was making a speech to the fallen.41

Whereas the novels describe a world in which people are treated as inanimate objects, Salminen gives inanimate objects human capabilities. Quite an ambivalent gesture, again. On the one hand, the main thesis in his texts—according to which neoliberalism treats people as things—is repeated: people and things are interchangeable. On the other hand, personification of things de-commodifies commodities; it is a poetic act of de-commodification.

Personally, I find the poetic ruptures in Salminen’s narration to be among the hopeful elements of his otherwise somewhat dystopian novels; they feel like a minimum condition of possibility for any effective political resistance. The poetic ruptures relate to Salminen’s political task and literary ethos: to represent critically neoliberal instrumentalization in a deeply commodified situation where it seems almost a lie to pretend that a non-instrumentalized discourse is possible. What is more, some personifications speak for the voiceless people, and in a very powerful way. Kalavale begins:

40 “Puut, tapojensa orjat, kallistuivat kaikki samaan suuntaan, saman verran, vaikka tuuli kuljetti pelkkää tyhjyyttä paikasta toiseen.” (Salminen 2004, 166)

41 “Olohuoneen lattialla oli tyhjä viinipulloja. Kaikki maksivat kyljellään suu auki, paitsi yksi. Se seisoi porukan edessä korkki päissään ja piti puhetta kaatuneille.” (Salminen 2003, 17)
Smashed bottles did not differ from the broken. The pieces were lying mute below the bus shelter. They had a destiny, yet not a language. Thus their past was left unexplained; thus their future was left undone.\(^{42}\)

This illustration of trash compresses the thesis which I interpret as the ethical and political motive for the writer’s critique of neoliberalism: the broken are not heard; they do not have any recognized language in society to communicate their experiences, nor any real influence in the decisions affecting their lives.

**References**


\(^{42}\) “Rikotut pullot eivät hajonneista poikenneet. Sirpaleet makasivat mykkinä bussipysäkin katoksen alla. Kohtalo niillä oli, mutta ei kieltä. Siksi niiltä jää mennyt selittämättä, siksi niiltä jää tuleva tekemättä.” (Salminen 2005)


Uusitalo, Hannu. 2000. “Köyhyys ja tulonjako” [Poverty and income distribution]. In Köyhyys ja hyvinvointivaltion murros [Poverty and the break of the welfare


Varpio, Yrjö. 2006. Väinö Linnan elämä [The life of Väinö Linna]. Helsinki: WSOY.
Based on the author’s doctoral dissertation, this volume about Helsinki literature—the term is the author’s—lets the reader peruse decades of Finnish prose masterpieces from 1890 to 1940. These pieces of fiction were produced during periods when the political state of Finland changed continuously and the development of European literature in general went through multiple, fundamental changes from late realism to the first phases of modernism. If nature was the most valued milieu for the Romantics, naturalists took developing cities and urbanization seriously and began to analyze the problems of the living conditions of humans. Later in the Modernist period, narratives of the city developed from utopias to dystopias and explorations of fragmented alienation. Even though reliving these layers of Helsinki literature is very enjoyable, it is a bit of a pity that the author concentrates on a close reading of selected pieces and thus loses the opportunity to discuss the more political, social, and architectural contexts that Helsinki might provide.

Several landmarks are worth noticing before turning to the author’s study question and analysis of the selected texts. The literature written in Finnish is definitely rooted in realism, as it occurs so soon after a certain, short phase of Romanticism that evoked the composition of the *Kalevala* (1848/1870) and the development of the Finnish written language. Most of the early writers who wrote in Finnish came from the countryside, from peasant and worker families, while for historical reasons Swedish was the language most often used in cities and by government. There is also a large amount of literature written in Swedish in Finland, but it is not included in this study.

Furthermore, Helsinki was a relatively new capital. Only after the Great Fire of Turku in 1827 did the government as well as the university move to Helsinki. Helsinki was not “their own” for the Finnish people; there were no emotional connections that would have produced literature evoking the writers’ involvement with the city, in the way that Dickens praised London or many poets have honored eternal Rome. Instead, in Finnish literature, Helsinki was something “new” and “foreign” to be explored, and not always enjoyable.
In this study, the author has selected a few prototypical “key texts” that represent how the city of Helsinki is experienced in protagonists’ minds and how the protagonists reflect the city. This research design leads to a close reading of the narratives and provides a kind of narrative itself. First, the city of Helsinki is a disorienting space for a peasant who has arrived in the city, as in Juhani Aho’s novella, *Helsinkiin (To Helsinki)* (1889), a familiar pattern and character type in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century novel: the “Young Man/Woman of the Provinces” who is often eager, shocked, innocent, and easily fooled. Second, the daily experiences of urban public spaces are closely connected to the people’s various backgrounds, a significant difference from life in the monocultural peasant villages. Eino Leino’s novel *Jaana Rönty* (1907) describes a female protagonist who comes to the city, tries to imitate the manners of city women, and ends up being raped at the police station. For the bourgeoisie, the ritual of walking along the Esplanade was a very different social act than for the prostitutes, and Leino’s protagonist learns this far too late. The city is not so easy to understand.

The other chapters discuss the rapid change of the city: Helsinki is a capital that is depicted as an expanding and transforming city, with certain parts of it also disappearing, giving space for new streets and buildings. In some literature written in the 1920s and 1930s, the city and city life are strongly aestheticized and internalized, which echoes the love of urban technology and the development of the futurist movements, which also inspired some Finnish writers such as those belonging to the Torch Bearers movement. In Mika Waltari’s sentimental debut novel, *Suuri illusioni* (The great illusion) (1928), urban life is no longer something that the main characters try to understand; instead, city life with its high stone buildings, advertising lights, and car traffic defines the characters’ imagination and relationships and the plot development of the novel. Like Helsinki, the characters are young, restless, and emotionally distressed. Finally, when the city moves inwards, the experience of Helsinki also reflects the margins, as characters explore the working-class areas of Punavuori, Sörnäinen, or Vallila, or the city expanding into new stylish living areas, such as Töölö.

During all the decades analyzed, Finnish literature remains mostly realistic. Joel Lehtonen’s novel, *Henkien taistelu* (The battle of the spirits) (1933), is a rare example of Menippean satire in Finnish literature, as the author narrates the tales of marginalized city dwellers in city spaces. In terms of imaginary Helsinki literature, there is not much at all. Therefore, it seems that early Helsinki literature only reflects the serious project of the slow development of the city and Finns’ even slower
mental adjustment to it. In Finnish literature, the “modernization of literature” finally occurred after the wars in the 1940s and 1950s; then the questions of the modern human condition appeared in fiction.

While reading, I became curious about the genre of this volume. The publisher, Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura (Finnish Literature Society), uses labels like tietokirja (non-fiction book for more general audiences) and tiedekirja (non-fiction book that contains peer-reviewed content and is based on scientific study); this book is an example of the latter. As a reader who has conducted some literature analysis, I enjoy the systematic close reading and the structure of the study in general, but I am still eager to know more about the method and theories the author has probably used in the dissertation, and that discussion is not present in this volume. If the idea of tiedekirja is to provide scientific knowledge for selected audiences, why not develop the genre further and use different styles in a more experiential way? It seems that the prose literature analyzed here would suggest plenty of narrative options for the study too. Now the style is still a fluent scientific analysis with a few stylistic experiments. Also some changes in style seem a bit inappropriate. On page 115, where the history of Helsinki and the map of the city are suddenly introduced, their presentation is far away from the aesthetic or architectural, even if the concept of “city” would give plenty of possibilities for stylistic experiments. To conclude, in this volume, the city of Helsinki in literature is rigorously analyzed, but quite conventionally discussed.

Johanna Pentikäinen
University of Helsinki


There is an interesting personal story behind this book. English expatriate Jonathan Clements, who has lived in Finland many years, became obsessed with the Marshall of Finland a few years ago. The dying father of his Finnish fiancée “dragged” Clements round Finland to see all the significant sights in Mannerheim’s life. After he married, his now-wife helped Clements come to grips with Mannerheim’s Swedish diaries, and Clements’ own research seems to have involved following the Mannerheim trail all the way to China. The result is this absorbing, superbly detailed, powerfully written biography, Mannerheim: President, Soldier, Spy.
Although the subtitle scans well, most of the book is focused on Mannerheim’s extraordinary life as a spy and a soldier. Clements explains, in a very readable yet measured way, that Mannerheim was born into a Swedish-speaking Finnish noble family in 1867, which made him a baron. Poorly behaved at school, he was sent to a military academy in the hope it would teach him self-discipline. Expelled from the Finnish military academy, the wayward youth made his way to St. Petersburg (Finland was then a Grand Duchy under Russian rule) and qualified as an army officer there, all the time being funded by generous relatives. He married a Russian aristocrat, had two children, and became one of the Chevalier Guards (guarding the royal family), stationed in St. Petersburg. Not only does this period in the Marshall’s life allow Clements to employ his skill in bringing a city to life—he describes some unusual and tragic incidents that occurred while Mannerheim was there—but we also learn that the *lingua franca* in multicultural St. Petersburg was German.

By 1904, Mannerheim still hadn’t seen any real fighting, his only war wounds being inflicted by belligerent horses. He also broke up with his wife and started gambling. Needing money, he volunteered to fight in the Russian war against Japan, and Clements takes us on an intriguing journey through the notable people he met and the problems he encountered. In perhaps the most eye-opening part of the book, Mannerheim then became a spy, touring China, overtly as a Swedish anthropologist—his fieldwork was published after his death—who is in fact only interested in finding out about military fortifications for the Tzarist regime.

Mannerheim, now a colonel, fought assorted other campaigns until, in 1917, he made his way back to St. Petersburg and by chance got embroiled in the February Revolution, in which Imperialist agents were being killed. He was spotted looking like an officer and asked why he was wearing officer boots. Mannerheim’s witty reply—that he’s lucky to be able to get hold of any boots these days—saved his life. The Marshall very narrowly escaped being killed in the February Revolution on a number of other occasions. In another instance, when he fled Russia for Finland, the border guards were Finnish-speaking Ingrians, and Mannerheim’s knowledge of Finnish saved his life. The escape from St. Petersburg reads like a well-written thriller and is one of the most gripping parts of Clements’s work.

Less than a hundred years have passed since Finland was torn apart by a civil war. Movies are still regularly produced about it. Clements does the best job I have yet seen, in a popular work, of explaining the complex reasons why the civil war occurred, without leaving the reader asking too many questions. Mannerheim is somehow the right man in the right place and the right time, with brilliant military
ingenuity, who evacuated Red-occupied Helsinki of important Whites, set up a capital in Vaasa, and, in an albeit brutal campaign, took back the south of the country. This made him a national hero for the Whites and a hated murderer for the Reds. As the country rebuilt, he was its head of state—a position he never really sought.

Clements has not only narrative but also comic skill. He seems to know instinctively when there has been a little too much serious historical description, such that it’s time to bring in an amusing anecdote. The book is peppered with these, and possibly the best is that, in the 1930s, having retired after failing to be elected president, Mannerheim became irritated by the noise of a supposed coffee shop (actually a Prohibition-era speakeasy) on an island not far from his house. Therefore, he bought the shop, made it far more respectable and was, in essence, a coffee-shop proprietor until the Winter War broke out. Also, in the early 1900s, he returned from the front and surprised his family (who feared he was dead) on Christmas Eve, dressed as Santa.

The book culminates in Finland’s darkest hour; the invasion by the Soviets. Mannerheim was brought out of retirement to respond to this, and Clements defends his actions—in ceding 12 percent of Finland—arguing that it was the shrewdest way to keep the country independent. Again, Clements is in his element, dramatically describing every step of the war and providing morsels of detail that testify to the intensive research he has obviously undertaken. The war united the divided nation under Mannerheim, he was made the Marshall of Finland, and he was president in its wake—again through circumstance rather than ambition. When, between the wars, the nationalist Lapua Movement asked him to take over the country as a military leader, he refused. But now Mannerheim has cemented his place as the national hero.

For a book aimed at any educated layperson or undergraduate student, there are a number of suggestions for improvement that might be made. A little more background on the nature of the Finnish nobility might have been helpful. It would have been useful to translate currency figures into modern dollars or euros. But these are minor issues.

This is an excellent biography of an amazing individual of whom more deserves to be known.

Ed Dutton
University of Oulu

An individual’s need to read the Bible is a major tenet of Protestantism, so Lutheran Finland has had a long history of teaching all people to read. The ability to write, to sow black seeds on a white field, was not seen as an essential component of literacy throughout much of the Nordic world until the long nineteenth century, roughly from the French Revolution to the First World War, when laws for general education were enacted in all Nordic countries. Writing was especially problematic in Finland where much literacy education was done in Swedish, and general education was not mandatory until 1921. In 1831, the Finnish Literature Society was founded to collect and promote Finnish literature and literacy. Its success can be seen in the growth of Finnish literacy from approximately 5 percent in 1830 to 40 percent by 1900 (103).

This collection of essays presents literacy studies as part of the “new history from below,” a perspective which focuses on common people. All of the essays present a sociocultural context for the entire range of literacy activities. The texts described and discussed in this book are all the production of people with limited education, most often of the peasant or laboring class. Each essay examines texts where the writer has created an entire document and not merely proved the ability to sign a name or copy a short passage, which demonstrates alphabetism, rather than literacy. Although the subtitle is “Nordic Literacy Practices,” the book focuses on Iceland, Finland, and Sweden, exclusively. This book is the product of an international research network organized by the Finnish Literature Society and funded by a NORDCORP grant.

The first essay, by Martyn Lyons, author of *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World,* describes the development of historiography concerned with the history of below and the contributions of literacy studies to the development of “the new history of below.” He provides a context for the later essays in the collection by discussing studies of literacy throughout Europe and focusing on letters written by Italian soldiers during the First World War. In contrast to the writings by the Finns discussed in later essays, these Italian soldiers expressed little national identity in their letters.

Of the other twelve essays in the book, six concern Finnish subjects. Kirsti Salmi-Niklander addresses the genres and means of production of handwritten
newspapers in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finland. Handwritten newspapers provided a means of sharing information free from the economic constraints of printing and official censorship. Her essay discusses two village newspapers, one written by a farmer and one by a crofter’s son, and a newspaper produced by an agrarian society. Juho Kaksola, an autodidact, wrote eighteen issues of two newspapers between 1862 and 1863. Most of the issues were filled with material he wrote encouraging literacy, condemning the use of alcohol, and promoting what he perceived as civilized behavior. His newspaper is primarily monologic, one man sharing his opinions with his peers. Kalle Eskola, although coming from a more modest background than Kaksola, had obtained some education. However, he was threatened and discouraged by the local gentry from writing his newspaper. This paper contains a few writings of others, and contains local history stories, showing the writer reaching out to the local community. The final paper examined is the handwritten Virittäjä, the newspaper of the Hiirola agrarian youth society. The articles in this newspaper were all produced anonymously or pseudonymously, showing the collective nature of the newspaper. These papers show the importance of the handwritten newspaper as a part of the social and national development of Finland and its resistance movements.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, it was assumed that unschooled people in Finland did not produce many self-written documents, and even fewer autobiographical documents; however, research into public archives, private collections, and printed texts has unearthed numerous examples. Anna Kuismin’s essay examines sixty-five life stories written by people born between 1751 and 1880 in a variety of genres including autobiography and autobiographical novels and poems, memoirs, and texts that focus on only a few aspects of the writer’s life. She divides the group of writings into those written to instruct the next generation of the life experiences of the parent, those written as an apology or confession, and those written as conversion narratives. Her essay concludes by examining some of the differences between these Finnish life writings and the English and French autobiographies examined by Martyn Lyons and the Swedish ones studied by Britt Liljewall. Finnish life stories seem less motivated by the need to preserve traditional culture and include more introspection.

The work of a single author, Kustaa Brask, is the subject of Kaisa Kauranen’s essay. Brask lived from 1829 to 1906 as an unmarried crofter in Joroinen in eastern Finland. He attended no more than a few weeks of school, but he created a collection of writings of over 5,700 pages, which he sent to the Finnish Literature Society
over the course of his life. His writings are in multiple genres: poems, textbooks, collections of folklore, and pages about agriculture, history, education, religion, philosophy, and society. Most of his manuscripts are a few dozen pages in length, while one is almost three hundred pages long. Though he attempted many times to have his work published, Brask’s work was never printed in his lifetime. Kauranen seeks to place Brask as a writer within the Finnish context and the international context. Brask “wanted to inform the elite in Helsinki about the living conditions of the poor and the social ills in the countryside; on the other hand, he wanted to address the common people on topics relevant to them” (122).

One of the major goals of the Finnish Literature Society was the collection and preservation of folklore. Kati Mikkola examines the lay collectors, especially those self-taught, and their notions of the nature and significance of the work they did. She examined 1,600 letters and thirty autobiographies from ninety lay collectors primarily from the end of the 1800s to the late 1940s. In addition to discussing the way this large body of material reveals remnants of the class structure, the backgrounds and difficulties of the collectors, and the endeavor of nation building, Mikkola describes two specific collectors, Vilho Itkonen and Ulla Mannonen, “who contested the conventions set by researchers” (148). Itkonen collected folklore from the 1890s until the 1910s. He became influenced by theosophy and sent a manuscript to the Finnish Literature Society, in which he criticized academic scholars of folklore for presenting solely a materialistic interpretation of folklore and its magic. He also contested the idea that folklore was nationalistic and purely a product of the past to be used to demonstrate the nation’s long history. For him, folklore was a representation of human truth. Ulla Mannonen collected folklore from 1936 to 1956. Although she was honored by the society, she was also criticized for submitting artifacts that were deemed not authentic or of sufficient historical interest. She contended that photographs of herself or collections of recent children’s rhymes would have value in the future. Her examination sheds light on what was valued by the official archivists as worthy of preservation.¹

The final two essays, one by Petri Lauerma and one by Lea Laitinen and Taru Nordlund, present linguistic analysis of the development of modern written Finnish. Both discuss the impact of dialect on the development of standard written Finnish during the long nineteenth century. Lauerma looks at writings done by members

¹ See the recent theme issue of the Journal of Finnish Studies guest edited by Pia Olsson and Eija Stark, From Cultural Knowledge to Cultural Heritage: Finnish Archives and Their Reflections of the People (Journal of Finnish Studies 18.1).
of various religious revival movements while Laitinen and Nordlund study letters written by Finnish farmers in various locations to the Bergbom trading house. This essay also looks at letters written by Finnish immigrants to North America to their relatives back home. Most of the writers had not been formally educated and were trying to devise a written language to suit their needs.

The essays vary widely in the quality of the writing and in their accessibility. Some authors expect the reader to be knowledgeable in linguistics or literacy studies. Other articles provide enough background material to be easily read by anyone. The greatest value in the book may be in spreading awareness of the quantity of writing by ordinary Finns during the long nineteenth century that has been preserved and is available for study by historians, literacy scholars, linguists, and anyone else interested in the thoughts and lives of Finnish peasants.

Diane Dowdey
Sam Houston State University
CONTRIBUTORS

Elsi Hyttinen, PhD, is a Research Fellow in Finnish literature at the School of History, Culture and Arts Studies, University of Turku. Her thesis *Hard Work and Twists of Faith: Elvira Willman’s Struggle for Working-Class Authorship* (2012) tracks the birth of the working-class writer as a category in early twentieth-century Finland. Her current interests lie in queer figurations of desire in Finnish literature written in the years immediately preceding the country’s declaration of independence.

Hanne Koivisto, Lic. Phil., is lecturer in Cultural History, Open University at the University of Turku. She is writing her doctoral thesis about how Finnish Left intellectuals built their identity and struggled for it from the 1930s through the 1950s. She has published several articles about this theme. Recently she has been interested in illuminating the question of identity of Left intellectuals from different angles such as the history of emotions and friendship, socialist utopias and nostalgias, as well as religious rhetoric in the texts of socialist poets.

Kati Launis, PhD, is a docent in Finnish Literature at the University of Turku. Her main areas of research are nineteenth-century literature and discourses of class in Finnish working-class literature. She is the author of *Narrated Women: The First Novels Written by Women in Finland Defining Womanhood* (2005, in Finnish) and numerous articles on nineteenth-century female writers, working-class writers, and Gothic fiction.

Jussi Ojajärvi, PhD, is a university lecturer in literature, University of Oulu, and a docent in Finnish literature, University of Turku. He has extensively studied the representations of capitalism and its relation to subjectivity in Finnish literature.

Milla Peltonen, PhD, is a grantee in Finnish literature at the School of History, Culture and Arts Studies, University of Turku. She specializes in Finnish postrealism and is currently working on a biographical study of Hannu Salama.

Mikko Pollari, MA, is a doctoral student in history at the School of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Tampere. His dissertation, currently in progress, deals with ideological change within the Finnish working-class movement in the first years of the twentieth century.
Veli-Matti Pynttäri, PhD, is a grantee in Finnish literature at the School of History, Culture and Art Studies, University of Turku. His thesis “Only this course of action seems productive . . .”: Psychoanalysis as the Myth of the Modern Age in the Cultural Criticism of T. Vaaskivi was published in 2011. He is currently working on a project, “Essays in Crises,” that focuses on the essayistic cultural criticism in Finland from the 1930s to the present.

Kirsti Salmi-Niklander, PhD, is an Academy Research Fellow and a docent in Folklore Studies, University of Helsinki. Her doctoral thesis, Self-Education and Rebellion (2004, in Finnish), is a case study of oral-literary traditions of working-class youth in the industrial town Karkkila during the 1910s and the 1920s. In her post-doctoral project she has studied handwritten newspapers as an alternative medium in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finland. Her current research projects are concerned with oral-literary practices among nineteenth-century students, among Finnish working-class writers, and in Finnish immigrant communities in North America.

Jaana Torninoja-Latola, MA, is a doctoral student in Finnish history, University of Turku. In her dissertation, currently in progress, she is studying the political lives of the Sinervo sisters, who were active agents in the field of the Finnish working-class movement from the 1930s to the end of the 1950s. She has published several articles on the topic.