

# The Making of Swedish Working-Class Literature

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The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the tradition of Swedish working-class literature. Today, the most common terms for working-class literature and working-class writer in Swedish are “arbetarlitteratur” [literally: “worker literature”] and “arbetarförfattare” [“worker-author”]. Historically, many different terms have been used, including “arbetardiktning” and “arbetardikt” [“worker poetry”/ “worker writing”], “proletärförfattare” [“proletarian author”], “proletärdikt” and “proletärdiktning” [“proletarian poetry”/“proletarian writing”], as well as “arbetarskald” [“worker-poet”]. Following Jan Stenkvist (1985, p. 24), I will treat these terms as synonyms, distinguishing between them only in the rare cases when specific meanings are attached to them (or when it is stylistically motivated).

The most prolific researcher within the field of Swedish working-class literature is Lars Furuland. His definition of this literature, which is the most commonly accepted one, states that it exists at the “intersection” between literatures *by*, *about* and *for workers*, and has a specific “ideological anchorage” (Furuland and Svedjedal, 2006, pp. 23–24).<sup>1</sup> Although he doesn’t explicitly specify this ideological anchorage, he stresses – in his very first attempt at defining working-class literature – that it be written by “authors who in one way or the other had ties to the labor movement” (Furuland, 1962, p. 14). Furthermore, Furuland’s research constitutes the foundation for the dominant view of working-class literature as a *tradition* beginning within the labor movement at the end of the nineteenth century and thereafter evolving into a

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central strand in modern Swedish literature that stretches all the way into contemporary times (Furuland and Svedjedal, 2006; Furuland, 1991 and 1977).<sup>2</sup>

As Ib Bondebjerg and Anker Gemzøe (1982, p. 6) have pointed out, both the phenomenon and the concept of working-class literature “evolve and change” throughout history in ways that constantly bring “new aspects and possibilities to the fore.” But, as has been emphasized by Raymond Williams (1977, p. 115; 2005, p. 39), traditions are always constructed retrospectively and constitute “intentionally selective” versions of the past in which “certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis” while “certain other meanings and practices are neglected and excluded.” Thus, it is not to be expected that all of the aspects and possibilities alluded to by Bondebjerg and Gemzøe are made visible in the narrative about the tradition of Swedish working-class literature dominant in contemporary research and criticism. Therefore, the overview of the history of Swedish working-class literature in this chapter will include an analysis of how this literature has been conceptualized in different ways, at different times, and in different contexts. This will open up for a reconstruction of Swedish working-class literature as an ever-changing phenomenon existing within a vast field of potentialities and possibilities, rather than as an essentialist or reified category. My goal is that this mode of historicizing will not only give a richer picture of Swedish working-class literature, but also help bring to the fore historical and theoretical questions relevant for the study of the phenomenon of working-class literature in general.

## **From the Labor Movement to National Literature**

The starting point for the tradition of Swedish working-class literature is generally placed within what Furuland has called the labor movement’s counter public sphere during the late nineteenth century (Furuland, 1977, pp. 4, 14; 1981, pp. 286–290; 1991, p. 148; Furuland and Svedjedal, 2006, pp. 24–25).<sup>3</sup> This literature – consisting mainly of poems and songs – was primarily viewed as a means for political agitation (Furuland, 1962, p. 290; Mral, 1985, p. 15).

Perhaps the first example of an author active within the labor movement who is described by a critic as “a proletarian writer”

can be found in a 1903 article by Hjalmar Branting (the first leader of the Swedish social-democratic party) about the poet K. J. Gabrielsson (better known under his pen name “Karolus”). Branting (1930, p. 174) describes Gabrielsson as “the first worker in our country who, without leaving his class ... reached a mastery of form and a scope in his production that grants him a place in the literature of our age.”

However, at least since the 1890s, authors within the Swedish labor movement had referred to themselves as proletarian or working-class poets (Furuland and Svedjedal, 2006, p. 21) and sometimes used pen names signaling either membership in the working class, for example “Miner’s wife,” or a commitment to socialist politics, such as “Socialist” (Mral, 1985, pp. 42–43). In some cases, these identities were also expressed in their works, as in the poem “Proletärpoetens sång” [“The Proletarian Poet’s Song”] (1894) by the pseudonym Helge Röd [Red Helge] (Uhlén, 1950, p. 366), or in Robert Ågren’s short story “Ur en litterär proletärs utvecklingshistoria” [“From the Story about the Development of a Literary Proletarian”] (1898).

Interestingly, authors who did not themselves come from the working class sometimes identified strongly with it in their works. One example of this can be found in the poem “Proletär” [“Proletarian”] (1905) by K. G. Ossiannilsson – a radical intellectual, who between 1903 and 1904 led the social-democratic youth organization and whose poetry was very popular within the labor movement. Here, the speaking subject includes himself in the proletariat through the use of the possessive pronoun “our”:

Proletarian – that is the title, comrades,  
it is the ringing of the clog against the paving-stone.  
It is imprinted on our costume, on our manners –  
if it is shameful, the shame is not ours.<sup>4</sup> (Haste, 1977, p. 164)

In their recollections from the literary life within the early labor movement, the authors and politicians Fredrik Ström and Axel Uhlén put more emphasis on the working-class authors’ politics than on their class backgrounds. Ström (1941, p. 15) argues that the term working-class writer was reserved for authors who “belonged to the movement, participated in its struggle” and “published their

works in its press and through its publishing houses,” and that no distinctions were made between “academic” and “uneducated” writers. Uhlén (1978, p. 6) defines working-class writers as those who “have been active in labor-movement activities and whose writing has been inspired by it, regardless of them being autodidact or not.” This downplaying of the authors’ backgrounds in favor of their involvement in the labor movement has been recognized in the academic research on early working-class literature. For example, in her monograph on working-class poetry published in the labor movement press before 1900 Brigitte Mral (1985) includes works by authors without working-class backgrounds, such as the socialist journalists Axel Danielsson and Atterdag Wermelin.

The first important transformation of Swedish working-class literature occurred early in the twentieth century, when a group of working-class writers started attracting attention from readers and critics outside the labor movement (mainly with realistic prose fiction) and achieved a first breakthrough for working-class literature in the national site of literature (Uhlin, 1950, p. 210; Furuland, 1977, pp. 15–16; 1991, p. 148; Furuland and Svedjedal, 2006, pp. 78–79). The most important representatives of this group were Dan Andersson, Leon Larsson, Maria Sandel, Karl Östman, Martin Koch, and Gustav Hedenvind-Eriksson. Some ten years later, another group of writers – whose most well-known representatives were Ragnar Jändel, Harry Blomberg, and Ivan Oljelund – also managed to establish themselves in the site of national literature.

Critics affiliated with the labor movement developed a discourse about these writers as working-class writers.<sup>5</sup> In two articles published in 1906, for example, the labor movement’s then leading critic, Bengt Lidforss (1920, p. 202), described Larsson first as a “working-class” and then as a “proletarian” poet. However, he didn’t use the same concepts when writing about Ossiannilsson, which indicates that he reserved them for writers who, like Larsson, were self-taught and had personal experiences of manual labor (Leopold, 2001, 130–138; 270; 330–396).<sup>6</sup> But Lidforss also stressed that Larsson was not only active as a writer within the labor movement: his aims were not only political but also artistic (Mattsson, 2016, p. 19). This shows that he did not only view him from a sociological or political perspective but also

from an aesthetic point of view. After Lidforss' death in 1913, Erik Hedén took over his role as the most important literary critic within the labor movement. Like Lidforss, he used terms such as "working-class writer" and "working-class literature" to describe writers of working-class background – among others Koch, Andersson and Hedenvind-Eriksson – and their works, more or less regardless of their politics and subject matters (Hedén, 1917; 1927, pp. 155, 207–211). Hedén also stressed the importance of viewing working-class literature, not as a means for political propaganda, but as works of *literature*, which may also fulfill political functions (Fahlgren, 1981, p. 90).

### The Proletarian Writer Recognized and Criticized

In 1921, the literary historian Richard Steffen published an anthology of modern Swedish literature intended for use in schools. In the foreword, he argued that the most powerful and, in many ways, the most interesting achievement in the literary production of the last two decades was what he termed *proletarian writing*:

It has been created by writers, who, although not "proletarians" in the strict sense, have emerged from the working classes, for longer or shorter periods lived the lives of workers ... and thus having had the opportunity to view social conditions from the dark depths that those of higher social standing have not dared or been able to sound out. Being autodidact and naturally talented, as a rule they have, with surprising ease, overcome the difficulties of the art of expression and, with their personal experiences, added to literature new groups of motifs, new ways of expression, and new attitudes toward the mysteries of life. (Steffen 1921, p. 7)

The importance of Steffen's book for later debates about working-class literature in Sweden cannot be overestimated. Therefore, some of the key points in his argument need to be highlighted: Steffen views working-class literature as an interesting *literary* phenomenon that *added* new dimensions to national literature. His definition of the working-class writer is centered on his *working-class background* (or, at least, his personal experiences of working-class life) and on his *lack of formal education*.

Steffen's book triggered a heated debate. Some authors – most notably Oljelund, Blomberg, and Jändel – protested vehemently against being labeled proletarian writers, arguing that it placed them outside literature proper and that an author's background or political affiliation should be considered irrelevant in literary discourse (Sundin, 1969, pp. 2912, 2929–2930; Stenkvis, 1985, pp. 228–230). Others – including Koch, Hedenvind-Eriksson and Östman – accepted and appreciated the categorization (Sundin, 1969, pp. 2924–2926, 2930–2931; Stenkvis, 1985, p. 232; Fahlgren, 1981, p. 70). Hedenvind-Eriksson (1961, p. 72), for example, argued that the characterization of him as a proletarian author was correct, since he was “born a proletarian,” had “lived and still lives as a proletarian,” was “self-taught” and wrote about “labor.” In an article allegedly written in 1921 but published in the brochure *Proletärdiktning* [*Proletarian Writing*] in 1929, Koch claimed that Steffen was “absolutely correct” in describing him as a proletarian author.

Several critics affiliated with the labor movement, including Hedén, Kjell Strömberg, and Valfrid Palmgren, defended the use of the terms *proletarian writer* and *literature* but tried to further develop them. Hedén, for example, insisted on working-class background being a central criterion (Sundin, 1969, p. 2922). Thus, he argued that the poet Ture Nerman (an academic of bourgeois background) should be excluded from the category of working-class literature (Mattsson, 2016, p. 21). However, he also argued that being born in the working class or being a “versed portrayer of workers' lives” did not automatically qualify anyone for the title of proletarian writer (Fahlgren, 1981, p. 70). Strömberg tried to downplay the authors' class backgrounds and instead focused more on the content of their works (Sundin, 1969, p. 2919). Palmgren stressed that working-class literature was a uniquely Swedish phenomenon and argued for its integration into national literature, thereby downplaying any antagonisms with bourgeois literature (Mattsson, 2016, p. 22).

According to Per-Olof Mattsson (2016, p. 28), it was Steffen who constructed the Swedish tradition of working-class literature and came up with the definition of this literature that is still accepted today. I do not agree with this.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, I do recognize that Steffen's discussion of working-class literature has had

important consequences. One of these was that it triggered a debate that led to the *concept* of working-class literature becoming established in national literary discourse. An equally important consequence was that Steffen's view of working-class literature as a *strand* in Swedish literature – and not as a mere abstract category – provided a platform for its constructions as a *tradition*. Both these consequences can be illustrated with an article published by the working-class author Ola Vinberg in 1927, which constitutes the first systematic attempt to write the history of Swedish working-class literature. Vinberg accepts Steffen's definition of working-class literature, but argues that he has failed to see that it constitutes a long tradition (1927, p. 3). The starting point for “proletarian writing proper” is, according to Vinberg (1927, pp. 10–11), the political poetry – by writers such as Gabrielson and Ågren – within the labor movement. Regarding the twentieth century, Vinberg (1927, pp. 19–20) bases his understanding of the tradition of working-class literature on Steffen's, but complements it with a large number of names of (often relatively unknown) writers of both poetry and prose. More importantly, he also gives attention to some young writers who had not been noticed by Steffen, including Eyvind Johnson and Ruldolf Värnlund, who would later be viewed as central figures in the tradition of Swedish working-class literature (Vinberg, 1927, p. 22).

Värnlund and Johnson belonged to a group of authors who around 1920 started building their identities as writers by emphasizing their non-academic and working-class backgrounds. Among other things, they founded the group “De Gröna” [“The Greens”] (Björklund, 1960, p. 173) that published the literary journal *Vår Nutid* [*Our Present Times*], in which they argued that the literature of the future would be written by those who “come straight from the school of life, from the factory or the plow,” the “young working-class poets.” That they also argued for the necessity of “getting rid of” the academic writers then dominating Swedish literature indicates that they viewed the relationship between proletarian and bourgeois literatures as marked by conflict (Lindberger, 1986, pp. 93–94).

From 1926, the critic Sven Stople repeatedly attacked working-class literature (Nordmark, 1978, p. 17), which he defined simply as

a literature written by workers that had become “dominant in our youngest literature” (Stolpe, 1928). However, because of an alleged lack of “spiritual resources” among the working-class writers, this literature was marked by an outdated style and was at odds with contemporary conditions. Great art, Stolpe further argued, had strong links to culture and education, and therefore he rejected “all democratic tendencies toward leveling within literature.”

Several working-class writers – among others Erik Asklund, Josef Kjellgren, and Ivar Lo-Johansson – replied to Stolpe’s attacks (Nordmark, 1978, p. 18; Vulovic, 2009, pp. 128–129). However, the most important responses were formulated by Värnlund, who did not wholeheartedly embrace the concept of “proletarian writer,” but nevertheless used it to describe a group of authors to which he counted himself (Nordmark, 1978, p. 29). In his article “Vi ‘proletärer’ i litteraturen” [“We ‘Proletarians’ in Literature”] from 1927, Värnlund (1964, pp. 54–55) acknowledges that the concept of proletarian writer can be used in a derogatory way, while at the same time reminding the reader that “the majority of the world’s greatest spirits have emanated from a proletariat, and created their great works without first having visited Uppsala University.” He also repeats an argument put forward in *Vår nutid*, when claiming that since the working class is a “modern class,” working-class writers – unlike authors belonging to other social groups – “have something to say” about the contemporary time and age (Värnlund, 1964, p. 55).

Unlike most other Swedish commentators at the time (as well as both earlier and later), Värnlund displays interest in non-Swedish working-class literature. In the article “Den internationella proletären i dikten” [“The International Proletarian in Literature”] (1930), he praised the mysterious author B. Traven’s *Die Baumwollpflücker* (published in English both as *The Wobbly* and *The Cotton Pickers*, 1925) and *Das Totenschiff* [*The Death Ship*] (1926). And in another article, he acclaimed Agnes Smedley’s *Daughter of Earth* (1929) and Michael Gold’s *Jews Without Money* (1930) (Värnlund, 1964, pp. 83, 101). Another example of the few attempts in Swedish discussions about working-class literature to view it as a part of an international phenomenon can be found within The Workers’ Educational Association, which in the 1920s

offered a lecture on “Fem arbetardiktare” [“5 Working-Class Writers”] without making distinctions between their nationalities: the Swedes Koch, Andersson and Oljelund, and the Danes Jeppe Aakjær and Martin Andersen-Nexø (Åkerstedt, 1967, p. 113).

## The Golden Age

The 1930s is generally viewed as the golden age for Swedish working-class literature – a decade when this literature has its definitive breakthrough and working-class writers dominated the nation’s literary life (Therborn, 1985, p. 585; Wright, 1996, p. 334; Furuland and Svedjedal, 2006, pp. 216, 316). This breakthrough can be symbolized by two events: The first is the publication in 1929 of the poetry collection *5 Unga* [5 *Youths*], in which five working-class authors – Erik Asklund, Josef Kjellgren, Artur Lundkvist, Harry Martinson and Gustav Sandgren – introduced modernist poetry in Swedish literature. The second event is the publication in 1933 of three novels – Lo-Johansson’s *Godnatt, jord* [Breaking Free], Moa Martinson’s *Kvinnor och äppelträd* [Women and Apple Trees], and Jan Fridegård’s *En natt i juli* [A Night in July] – that mark the introduction of both a new kind of working-class realism and a genre to which most of the leading working-class writers of the 1930s contributed: the more or less autobiographical proletarian coming-of-age novel, which thereafter has been the perhaps most important genre in Swedish working-class literature.

The new generation of working-class writers emerging around 1930 was criticized by some left-wing intellectuals – most notably the communist journalist and author Ture Nerman. His critique has often been interpreted as a rejection of modernist forms, but at its heart, it was directed at an alleged lack of proletarian class consciousness (Nilsson, 2003, pp. 245–253). However, the most ambitious attempt by a left-wing intellectual during the 1930s to conceptualize the newest working-class literature was made by the Marxist critic Erik Blomberg. He argued that during the 1930s an “artistically significant working-class literature” emerged in Sweden, and that working-class writers had achieved dominant positions in the nation’s literary life (Blomberg, 1977, p. 69). As representatives of this literature, Blomberg mentions Lo-Johansson,

Johnson, Harry and Moa Martinson, and Fridegård, all of whom he describes as proletarians writing about proletarians (Blomberg, 1977, p. 69). Both the authors' backgrounds and the subject matters of their works thus seem to have been important for Blomberg's understanding of the phenomenon of working-class literature. However, he also calls the Norwegian poet Rudolf Nilsen – who, despite growing up in a proletarian milieu, was not a worker but an academic intellectual – a “true proletarian poet” and criticizes “those who mean that only manual laborers can legitimately speak for the working class in literature” (Blomberg, 1977, pp. 234–235). In addition to this, his characterization of 1930s working-class literature as being “artistically significant” shows that he also emphasizes its aesthetical qualities.

Sometimes the working-class writers of the 1930s acted collectively. One example of this is that they debated publicly with Nerman (Matsson, 1975, pp. 63–72). They also published two collections of essays: *Ansikten* [*Faces*] (1932) and *Ausikter* [*Intentions*] (1945). In the foreword to the latter, it says that the contributors are “what one usually calls working-class writers” (Asklund et al., 1945, p. 5). In *Ansikten*, however, this term is only used in one of the contributions (Månsson et al., 1932, pp. 239). Instead, the contributors are said to belong to the group of the so-called “autodidacts” (Ibid., p. 5). It is also stressed that the collection does not aim at constructing any “collective” or “group” with a “program,” at the same time as it is emphasized that the contributors are united by having experiences from similar social conditions (Ibid., p. 5). Personal experience of social hardship and, especially, the lack of formal education are also thematized in many of the contributions, and often presented as virtues. Värnlund, for example, argues that traditional culture and education are irrelevant in the modern age, and Johnson expresses similar ideas when claiming that “the proletariat” is “creating contemporary life with its hands” and one day will give culture “new life” (Ibid., pp. 180–181, 197). Another interesting comment about working-class literature is made by the only female contributor to *Ansikten*, Maj Hirdman:

I know a wife of a statare [a poor estate worker] who could have written a novel, the like of which has never existed in Swedish literature, and perhaps will not exist in a long time. For no one else

can take her subject matter and write the book. Only she would have been able to. And that is a great loss for Swedish literature. (Månsson et al., 1932, p. 87)

Here, personal experience of working-class life is presented as a necessary prerequisite for its authentic representation in literature, at the same time as working-class literature is presented as a valuable contribution to national literature. The former idea is also expressed by Lo-Johansson in his contribution to *Avsikter*, where he argues that working-class writers have given “depth” to the representation of the proletariat in literature through their “extraction”: “All realist literature presupposes, on a fundamental level, first-hand experience, but the older Swedish writers could not possibly have that about the proletariat” (Asklund et al., 1945, p. 112). The second of Hirdman’s ideas is also articulated by Albert Viksten, who argues in *Avsikter* that through working-class literature “the Swedish people” have finally emerged in literature in its entirety, and that it should therefore be viewed as “a valuable contribution to a national literature in which hitherto mainly the propertied have appeared” (Ibid., p. 190). Finally, it is important to note that one of the contributors to *Avsikter*, Moa Martinson, criticizes the concept of proletarian literature. After pointing out that she is self-taught, has a proletarian background, and is politically radical, she declares that she nevertheless does not embrace the concept of proletarian writer since it “creates confusion” and “creates class difference where none exists”: “There are no proletarian authors, *there are only authors*” (Ibid., p. 149, emp. in the original). Thus, all the fundamental features of Steffen’s definition – according to which working-class literature is a literature produced by autodidact authors with personal experiences of working-class life that constitutes an important contribution to national literature – are present in the discussions in *Ansikten* and *Avsikter*. And so is the complaint voiced by some of those described by Steffen as proletarian writers – that such a labeling can alienate working-class writers from ‘literature proper.’

Just as important as *Ansikten* and *Avsikter* were for the construction of Swedish working-class literature, were – at least in retrospect – the attempts by one working-class writer, Lo-Johansson, in several essays and articles, to define and write the history of

this literature.<sup>8</sup> Even if the label “working-class literature” may have been used to “isolate” and “devalue,” he argues, there is no need to be ashamed of it (Lo-Johansson, 1946, pp. 207–208). He also claims that the Swedish tradition of working-class literature is unique in the world (Lo-Johansson, 1946, p. 268) but that the working-class writers, despite generally having experiences from the labor movement and from “the anonymous struggle and collective solidarity of the working masses,” have not been able to break with the subjective and individualist “bourgeois” novel. Furthermore, some of them have even “become bourgeois” (Lo-Johansson, 1946, pp. 231, 269). Thus, whereas some authors feared that the title ‘working-class writer’ would alienate them from the established notion of literature, Lo-Johansson argued that working-class literature had not yet achieved any radical enough break with the hegemonic, bourgeois understanding of literature.

During the 1930s, several attempts were made to write the history of Swedish working-class literature and to integrate this history into that of Swedish literature. The literary historian Kjell Strömberg (1932, pp. 180–184) follows the accounts given by Steffen and Vinberg but gives Ossiannilsson a more prominent role. Additionally, Strömberg presents Strindberg as “the first proletarian author,” thus implicitly downplaying the importance of the authors’ working-class backgrounds. It may also be noted that Strömberg does not include the modernist poetry of 5 Unga in the tradition of working-class literature, whereas four years later, Ivar Harrie, in his attempt to write the history of Swedish working-class literature, argues that both the realistic novels by Lo-Johansson and others and the modernist poetry of 5 Unga represent the culmination of important tendencies in older working-class literature (Harrie, 1936, pp. 69–70). In a book-length study of Swedish working-class literature from 1934, Holger Ahlenius (1934, pp. 5, 262–263) describes it as being (almost) “dominant” in Swedish literature and argues that several working-class writers – for example Johnson and Harry Martinson – belong to “the most outstanding talents and the finest coming men in contemporary Swedish literature.” Ahlenius contends that “the youngest generation of proletarian writers” are about to invent “their own art form, a new and special form of expression.” Like Steffen,

he defines working-class literature as literature written by autodidact authors emerging from the proletariat and stresses that it has enriched Swedish national literature through the introduction of hitherto unknown experiences and viewpoints. And yet, he also associates it with the increasing influence exercised by the working class in politics and in social life (Ahlenius, 1934, pp. 2, 262).

## After the Golden Age

After World War II, many of the working-class writers of the 1930s held dominant positions in Swedish literature, as evidenced, for example, by the fact that Harry Martinson, Eyvind Johnson, and Artur Lundkvist were elected members of the Swedish Academy (in 1949, 1957, and 1968 respectively) and that, in 1974, Martinson and Johnson received the Nobel Prize in literature. This was also the period when the working-class literature of the 1930s reached a mass audience through cheap editions distributed both by organizations associated with the labor movement and by commercial publishers (Furulund and Svedjedal, 2006, pp. 235–236, 507–515; Nilsson 2006, pp. 75–77). However, new working-class writers also appeared. The 1940s, for example, saw the breakthrough of the steel worker and modernist poet Stig Sjödin, the textile worker and novelist Folke Fridell, and of Lars Ahlin, whose novel *Tåbb med manifestet* [*Tåbb with the Manifesto*] (1934) gave new aesthetic and ethical impulses to Swedish working-class literature. In the 1950s, perhaps the most important addition to the tradition of working-class literature was the publication of Kurt Salomonson's novel *Grottorna* [*The Caves*] (1956), which criticized the working conditions in the Swedish mining industry.

Fridell (1970, p. 24) explicitly called for the “renewal of working-class literature” through increased engagement with “contemporary society’s problems.” He argued that the working-class writers of the 1930s had focused on the period before the labor movement’s political breakthrough, and had mainly protested against economic poverty, but that the time had now come to criticize working conditions in the modern industry and the class injustices suffered by workers in the social-democratic welfare state (Fridell, 1970, pp. 24–26, 37). He also argued that many of the

working-class writers of the previous decade had lost touch with their proletarian origins, thus stressing the importance of personal experience of labor and working-class life (Fridell, 1970, p. 25).

In a rather sympathetic response to Fridell's critique, Lo-Johansson made a series of comments regarding 1930s working-class literature. Among other things, he argued that, although "a few" authors had protested against being labeled working-class writers, the "most conscious ones" viewed it as an honorary title (Lo-Johansson, 1972, p. 89). However, Lo-Johansson's most ambitious attempt to write the history of Swedish working-class literature during this period was undertaken in his 1957 autobiographical novel *Författaren* [*The Author*]. Early in the novel, Lo-Johansson (1957, p. 6) provides a list of some fifteen names that according to him were the most important Swedish working-class writers of the 1920s and 1930s. Thereafter, more names are added throughout the narrative, including most of the contributors to *5 Unga*. Nonetheless, regarding the definition of a working-class writer, Lo-Johansson's novel is somewhat unclear. On the one hand, Hedenvind-Eriksson and Koch – the former of which came from a family of farmers, whereas the latter grew up in the petit bourgeoisie and, according to Lo-Johansson, had never really "belonged to the proletarian milieu" – are given central positions in the tradition of working-class literature (Ibid., pp. 43, 150). On the other hand, it is argued that another author, because he had worked as a clerk and attended junior secondary school, should not be viewed as a working-class writer (Ibid. 1957, p. 98).

In the 1950s and 1960s, academic literary historians began conducting research on Swedish working-class literature, and several more or less popular overviews of its history were published. Eric Uhlin's doctoral dissertation about Dan Andersson's early works from 1950 contains an extensive description of Swedish working-class literature from the first decades of the twentieth century, which, in principle, accords with the one presented by Steffen 30 years earlier. According to Uhlin (1950, pp. 210, 237), the working-class writers came from and wrote about new social strata in Swedish society. He contrasts them with writers having grown up in the bourgeoisie with academic education, while also stressing

that working-class literature must be understood as a *literary* phenomenon, and arguing that its first breakthrough was intimately connected to a general aesthetic reorientation within Swedish literature. A somewhat more controversial claim is that Strindberg was “the admired model and starting point” for the working-class writers (Ibid., p. 262), which to some extent downplays the emphasis put on the working-class authors’ proletarian class backgrounds. Uhlin (1950, pp. 237, 248, 262) also emphasizes foreign influence on Swedish working-class literature, mentioning, for example, Gorky’s idealism and Jack London’s autobiographical novel *Martin Eden* (1909). Another academic literary historian, Örjan Lindberger (1952, p. 9), also remains more or less true to Steffen and Vinberg when presenting the history of Swedish working-class literature in the introduction to the anthology *Svensk arbetardikt* [*Swedish Working-Class Writing*] from 1952, with the exception that he, like several commentators before him, also stresses that a working-class writer should, “in one way or another” have belonged to the labor movement and write about the working class. Lindberger also claims both that literature by “authors with working-class backgrounds” now constitutes the “main part of Swedish literature” and, more controversially, that in the 1940s, the history of “working-class literature proper” has come to an end (Ibid., p. 14). A similar idea is put forward by Lennart Thorsell (1957, p. 135), in an article about the “democratization” of Swedish literature, in which he argues that the “period, during which working-class literature as such blossoms and, from time to time, emphatically puts its stamp on the literary debates” is now “a closed chapter in the history of our literature.”

In a popular book-length presentation of the history of Swedish working-class literature from 1952, the publisher and literary critic Åke Runnquist tries to add a few new elements to the narrative about this literature, not the least regarding the 1930s and 1940s. One example of this is that he includes both 5 Unga and some poets associated with the socialist journal *Clarté* that did not have working-class backgrounds in the tradition of working-class literature (Runnquist, 1952, pp. 142–161). An academic dissertation on the representation of labor in Swedish working-class literature published a few years later is interesting primarily because

of the fact that its author, Elisabet Kågerman (1961), devotes a fair amount of energy to defining the concept of labor but not a single line to defining the concept of working-class literature. This shows that a clear correspondence between the concept of working-class literature and a literary tradition had now been established. In 1962, Furuland (1962, p. 14) published his dissertation, in which he subscribes to Lindberger's definition of working-class literature. More interesting, however, is that he highlights Alfred Kämpe as the archetypical working-class writer from the early twentieth century and as a predecessor to many younger colleagues, including several of the working-class writers of the 1930s. Simultaneously, he recognizes that there are huge differences between different generations (Furuland, 1962, pp. 304–305, 321, 338). Thus, he emphasizes both the continuity and the breaks within the tradition of Swedish working-class literature.

### **Working-Class Literature in the Age of Political Radicalism**

Like in several other countries, a general revival of working-class literature occurred in Sweden during the second half of the 1960s and the 1970s, in close connection to the period's rise in leftist radicalism (Nilsson, 2014a, pp. 71–74; Furuland and Svedjedal, 2006).<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, interest in older working-class literature increased; on the other hand, a large number of new working-class writers emerged. To the new generation of working-class writers – which published realist as well as documentary and experimental modernist works – belonged, among others, Maja Ekelöf, Göran Palm, Sara Lidman, Hans Lagerberg, Ove Allanson, Kjell Johansson, Torgny Karnstedt, Jan Fogelbäck, and Aino Trosell.

The general radicalism of the era affected the conceptualization of working-class literature through an increased focus on its relationship to politics and ideology. This is especially visible in the Marxist academic criticism from the period, which argued that all literature in a capitalist society expresses capitalist conditions and that the breakthrough for working-class literature in national Swedish literature should thus be viewed as an assimilation into bourgeois literature and ideology (Melberg, 1973, pp. 84–85, 101;

Melberg, 1975, p. 11; Holm, 1975, p. 247; Ahlmo-Nilsson, 1979, pp. 12–14; Olsson, 1979, p. 70). Interestingly enough, a similar view is expressed – but valued differently – in the award ceremony speech given by Ragnar Gierow when Johnson and Martinson were awarded the Nobel Prize in 1974. Echoing Steffen’s argument from 1921, Gierow (n.d.) stated that “the many proletarian writers or working-class poets” who “broke into” Swedish literature did so, not in order to “ravish” it, but “to enrich it with their fortunes.” “Their arrival,” he continues, “meant an influx of experience and creative energy.” And then he concludes: “A new class has conquered Parnassus. But if, by a conqueror, we mean the one who gained most from the outcome, then Parnassus has conquered a new class.”

In 1977, Furuland published an overview of the history of Swedish working-class literature up to contemporary times. His account of this history begins with a lengthy discussion about Strindberg, whom he views as a role model for the Swedish working-class writers (Furuland, 1977, pp. 4–11). Regarding the question whether class background or ideology is the most important criterion for defining this literature, Furuland (1977, p. 19) tends toward the latter, arguing that such contemporary academic authors of non-proletarian background as Lidman and Palm “evidently” belong to the tradition of working-class literature. The same view is also expressed by another academic critic, Birgitta Ahlmo-Nilsson (1979, pp. 14–15), who includes Lidman and Palm in a group of academic authors belonging to the tradition of working-class literature because they write about “proletarian milieus.” Regarding the 1930s, Furuland (1977, p. 17) argues for making a distinction between modernist and working-class literature. But another academic critic, Eva Adolfsson, promotes an opposite view and emphasizes that the modernist poetry constituted a central component in Swedish 1930’s working-class literature (Adolfsson 1976, p. 251). During this period, one can also note an increased emphasis on two claims: that, from an international perspective, the strong tradition of Swedish working-class literature is “unique” (Ahlmo-Nilsson, 1979, p. 7), and that it constitutes a dominant strand in modern Swedish literature (Holmgren, 1982, p. 64; Adolfsson, 1976, p. 251).

## The 1980s and 1990s

In the 1980s and 1990s, the status for (and interest in) working-class literature reached an all-time-low in Sweden, a fact that is thematized in much of the period's writing about this literature. In a book about modern working-class literature, for example, the poet Arne Säll (1986, p. 8) complains about "condescending" critics reducing working-class writers to "literature's second-raters." And, in a special issue of Sweden's then most esteemed literary journal, *Bonniers Litterära Magasin*, some commentators speculated – like others had done during the decades after World War II – that the tradition was coming to an end (Jonsson, 1987, p. 388) or, at the very least, emphasized that it was in a state of crisis (Olsson, 1987, p. 396).

However, efforts were also made to present another view. Säll (1986) pointed at several new authors that should be added to the tradition, including Ragnar Järhult, Mary Andersson, Lars Åke Augustsson, Gunnar Kieri, and Per Forsman. The collection *Vägval [Choice of Direction]*—published in 1987 by the four working-class writers Gunder Andersson, Hans Lagerberg, Kjell Johansson, and Reidar Jönsson—contained an essay by Andersson presenting the history of Swedish working-class literature, which also listed a large number of authors, including some making their debuts in the 1980s, such as Fredrik Ekelund, Eva-Lena Neiman, Åke Smedberg, and Ingmar Nylund (Andersson et al., 1987, pp. 11–44). In his contribution to a special issue of the journal *Arbetsarhistoria [Labor History]* about working-class literature published in 1991, Bernt-Olov Andersson (1991, pp. 20–21) also presented a list of contemporary young working-class writers, which to some extent overlaps with Säll's and Lagerberg's but also includes Mats Berggren, Göran Greider, and Tony Samuelsson.

An even more ambitious attempt to extend the tradition into contemporary times was the publication in 1987 of the collection *Utsikter [Prospects]*, which contained essays about working-class literature by 24 contemporary working-class writers. In the foreword, its editor Jan Fogelbäck (1987, p. 9) emphasizes that the book should be viewed as a continuation of a tradition starting with *Ansikten* and *Avsikter*, but that contemporary working-class

literature is different than that of the 1930s. For example, all working-class writers no longer are autodidact. Several contributors stress that changes in the composition of the working class and the class structure of Swedish society made necessary the inclusion of new social groups into working-class literature – mainly service-producing workers, but also salaried employees (Fogelbäck, 1987, pp. 35, 46, 85–86, 97). Some also argued for the need to renew the literary forms used in working-class literature or to give more attention to “existential” themes (Fogelbäck, 1987, pp. 35–37, 106, 120.). Similar arguments are put forward in *Vägval* (Andersson et al., 1987, pp. 49, 124).

In academic research, working-class literature continued to attract attention during the 1980s and 1990s, and new facets were added to the narrative about its history. One example of this is that Ebba Witt-Brattström (1988) – in a dissertation that attracted much attention and was even published as a paperback (!) – claimed that Moa Martinson should be viewed as a modernist writer, thereby recasting the relationship between realism and modernism in 1930s working-class literature.<sup>10</sup> Other attempts at fine-tuning the narrative about Swedish working-class literature involved highlighting female working-class writers (Adolfsson et al., 1981) or working-class writers associated with the anarcho-syndicalist labor movement (Furuland et al., 1999). In addition to this, Per-Olof Mattsson (1995) tried to shed new light on the breakthrough for working-class literature in the 1930s by connecting it to Sweden’s rapid industrialization and the alleged absence of a hegemonic bourgeois culture.

The French literary historian Philippe Bouquet represents something of a dissident voice in the academic research on Swedish working-class literature during this period. In a book originally published in French, he gave an account of the history of this literature that offered some new perspectives. One example of this is that he argued that the social, political, and cultural development – especially changes in education that have eliminated the autodidact writers – had made impossible the continuation of the tradition of working-class literature after the 1930s (Bouquet, 1990, p. 145). However, in his contribution to the above-mentioned special issue of the Swedish journal for

labor history, he argued instead that changes in the class structure of Swedish society had resulted in the emergence of *new kinds* of working-class literature rather than the end of the tradition (Ibid., pp. 10–12). These changes were also noted by several other contributors to the same journal issue, who argued that they made necessary a reconceptualization of the phenomenon of working-class literature. Hans Lagerberg (1991, pp. 13, 18–19) and Bernt-Olov Andersson (1991, pp. 20–21), for example, discussed whether the concept of working-class literature was useful in a situation in which the traditional working class seemed to be disappearing, and argued that working-class writers must strive to become relevant for “the new proletariat.”

Regarding the conceptualization of older working-class literature, some new ideas were also put forward during this period. In her dissertation about working-class poetry published in the labor-movement press before 1900, Brigitte Mral (1985, pp. 13–14) highlighted that the definition of the concept of working-class literature had been the object of many debates and that various scholars had defined it differently. She proposed that it be understood, in explicit opposition to “bourgeois literature,” as a literature thematizing the working class’ (or, rather, the labor movement’s) experiences, ideas, and goals. Similar definitions – which related (older) working-class literature not primarily to literature, but to working class culture in general and to the historical formation of the Swedish working class through the labor movement – were also put forward by scholars such as Håkan Bengtsson (1992, p. 12) and Stig-Lennart Godin (1994, p. 5).

In the 1980s, Lo-Johansson continued his attempts to define working-class literature and write its history. In his memoir *Tröskeln* [*The Threshold*] (1982), he gave an overview of four “generations” of working-class writers: the first consisting of writers born around 1870, such as Östman and Sandel, and the last encompassing the working-class writers of the 1930s (Lo-Johansson, 1982, pp. 88–100). According to Lo-Johansson, the latter generation constituted a numerous but heterogeneous group, including both realists and “at least some” of the modernist poets, and autodidact writers, as well as some with formal education (Ibid., pp. 99–100). He also claimed that their breakthrough was “the

most important event of the century in Swedish literature,” and that, from an international perspective, it was “unique” (Ibid., p. 119). Nevertheless he also pointed out a number of foreign authors that were popular among the Swedish working-class writers of the 1930s – including Michael Gold, William Saroyan, Erskine Caldwell, Isaac Babel, Mikhail Sholokhov, Richard Aldington, D.H. Lawrence, and Alfred Döblin – while arguing that it was quite simply “wrong” to view Strindberg as some sort of role-model (Ibid., pp. 211, 217). In his contribution to *Utsikter*, Lo-Johansson made, made two interesting remarks: the first was that even if Swedish working-class literature is a unique and important phenomenon, it had not received total recognition in the site of literature, and the second was that contemporary working-class writers may very well have a secondary-education degree (Fogelbäck, 1987, pp. 187, 190). In the last book he published before his death, the essay collection *Till en författare* [*To an Author*] (1988), Lo-Johansson further specified his view of working-class literature. Perhaps most importantly, he argued that the phenomenon of working-class literature should be understood in relation to the class structure of a capitalist society – as a literature that “fights bourgeois society” – at the same time as he highlighted that, first and foremost, a working-class novel must be a “work of art” (Lo-Johansson, 1988, pp. 6, 25, 107). He also argued that working-class literature represents not only thematic but also formal innovations in Swedish literature, mainly in the form of attempts at creating an “aesthetic of the collective” (Ibid., p. 109).

## Working-Class Literature in Contemporary Sweden

In recent years, several commentators have noticed the emergence of a new generation of working-class writers publishing works that have been positively received by both critics and readers (Williams, 2016, pp. 212–213; Nilsson, 2014b).<sup>11</sup> The starting point for this latest breakthrough was the publication of two (more or less) autobiographical proletarian coming-of-age novels: Susanna Alakoski’s *Svinalängorna* [*The Pig Houses*] (2006) and Åsa Linderborg’s *Mig äger ingen* [*I Am Owned by Nobody*] (2007). Thereafter have followed several important new contributions to the tradition of

Swedish working-class literature by, among others, Johan Jönson, Jenny Wrangborg, Kristian Lundberg, David Ericsson, and Maria Hamberg (Nilsson, 2016a; Agrell, 2016; Williams, 2016). Some central – and, in part, interconnected – features of this new working-class literature are its focus on the new “class reality” of post-industrial Sweden, its explorations of class as a multi-faceted phenomenon with strong ties to gender and ethnicity, and its focus on formal innovation (Nilsson, 2010; 2014b; 2016a).

Just before this breakthrough, two book-length studies of the history of Swedish working-class literature were published: Lars Furuland’s *Svensk arbetarlitteratur* [*Swedish Working-Class Literature*] (2006), which was co-written with Johan Svedjedal, and my own *Arbetarlitteratur* [*Working-Class Literature*] (2006). Whereas the former contains what could be regarded as the most comprehensive account of the tradition of Swedish working-class literature ever published, the latter proposes a new, non-essentialist conceptualization of this literature – as literature whose reception is substantially influenced by a perceived connection to the working-class (Nilsson, 2006, pp. 25–27).<sup>12</sup> Following these studies, the interest in both older and newer Swedish working-class literature has increased among literary scholars. The research publications from recent years include four edited collections (Johnson et al., 2011 and 2014; Agrell et al., 2016; Hamm et al., 2017) of new research, several doctoral dissertations (Vulovic, 2009; Johansson, 2013; Mischliwietz, 2014; Hillborn, 2014), and a large number of articles. In general, this research has been anchored in already established definitions. Jimmy Vulovic (2009, p. 21) states in his dissertation about Eyvind Johnson and Rudolf Värnlund that he will not discuss questions about “what working-class literature is,” which indicates that there is consensus about how they should be answered. Beata Agrell’s (2016, pp. 25–26) definition of working-class literature more or less replicates Furuland’s. For example, she retells his narrative of the tradition of Swedish working-class literature rather faithfully (Ibid., pp. 23–34). However, (mild) revisions are continually proposed. Johan Landgren (2014, p. 27) argues that increased attention to early working-class poetry written by women could lead to a view of the literature produced within the labor

movement's counter public sphere as being more complex and dynamic than has hitherto been assumed. Johannes Björk (2014) has claimed that it might be worthwhile to speak of a pre-history to the working-class literature emerging within the labor movement's counter public sphere in the late nineteenth century. He also argues that the politics of Swedish working-class literature is best understood with the point of departure in Jacques Rancière's philosophy, as an attempt to deconstruct the ideological opposition between workers and the realm of aesthetics. Furthermore, some researchers have begun bringing to the fore how working-class writers' representations of class intersect with discourses about gender, nation, and ethnicity and how working-class literature relates to phenomena such as "immigrant" and "feminist" literature (Mattsson, 2013; Mischliwietz, 2014; Jonsson, 2014; Landgren, 2014; Nilsson, 2010).

Contemporary Swedish working-class writers have also made efforts to give working-class literature more visibility. In 2006, Tony Samuelsson (pp. 120–122, 196, 223) published a collection of essays in which he argued that, since the 1990s, the signs for a revival for working-class literature had been accumulating. Samuelsson further claimed that contemporary working-class literature – which, according to him, does not always present itself as belonging to the tradition – challenges old and rigid stereotypes about both this kind of literature and the working class. At the same time, he contends, it both upholds the high standards set by the working-class writers of the 1930s and renews the tradition emanating from them. In recent years, working-class writers have also, to an extent hitherto unparalleled, acted collectively to promote working-class literature. The main vehicle for this has been "Föreningen Arbetarskrivare" [The Association for Writing Workers]. In their anthologies from recent years, the links between contemporary and older working-class literature are often emphasized (Svanberg, 2010, p. 9; Johansson, 2012, p. 8; Johansson and Karnstedt, 2014, p. 6). However, an analysis of their content shows that both subject matters and the authors' biographies are indeed conditioned by the contemporary transformations of Swedish class society (Nilsson, 2016a, pp. 270–273). In 2015, "Föreningen Arbetarskrivare" began publishing the literary

journal *Klass* [*Class*], which is entirely devoted to working-class literature and which has been a great success. Furthermore, in 2017, one of its members, Mattias Torstensson, launched the podcast “Arbetarlitteratur” [“Working-Class Literature”], which has likewise been very successful.

## The Dynamic Phenomenon of Swedish Working-Class Literature

Swedish working-class literature is a historical and heterogeneous phenomenon, consisting of works that have been associated with the working class in different ways. While some commentators have insisted on the authors’ working-class backgrounds being a fundamental characteristic of this literature, others have put more emphasis on its affiliation with the labor movement, or the promotion of class consciousness and socialist politics. To some extent these different views can be related to an important distinction between two different conceptualizations of working-class literature: as primarily a political or a literary phenomenon. This distinction, in turn, has a distinct bearing on many other questions. One of these regards how the breakthrough for working-class literature in Swedish literature should be understood—as a valuable contribution to the national literary heritage, or as a challenge (successful or not) to bourgeois literature or ideology? Every definition of Swedish working-class literature, and every account of its history, run the risk of obscuring these dynamics. Therefore, the history of this literature needs to incorporate the heterogeneous process of its construction.

Parallel to the shifting conceptualizations of Swedish working-class literature, there has been a relative consensus regarding some features of its history. For instance, there is agreement that it emerged within the labor movement but later became a central strand in modern Swedish literature. The latter fact makes it unique from an international perspective. This consensus risks making invisible some aspects of the tradition of Swedish working-class literature, and limits the chances of understanding the potentialities and possibilities inherent in the concept of working-class literature. The idea about a move from the labor movement to the

sphere of national literature, for example, may obscure that the labor movement has actually been an important infrastructure for Swedish working-class literature throughout its history (Nilsson, 2016c, p. 127). The insistence on the strength of the Swedish tradition risks making invisible that – as has been demonstrated above – there have been periods when it has received less attention in the site of literature. It also risks leading to a too simplistic view of the relationship between working-class and bourgeois literature. For, if Sweden remains a capitalist country (as, indeed, it does), must not the ‘victory’ of working-class literature mean that it was ‘just’ a literary phenomenon and that its potential political effects are, hence, hardly worthy of attention? And, will not the emphasis on the unique nature of Swedish working-class literature obscure the connections between working-class writers in Sweden and other countries?

Not only attention to the heterogenous history of the construction of Swedish working-class literature, but also comparisons with working-class literatures in other countries – and with research on these literatures – can contribute to highlighting the dynamic nature of the phenomenon of working-class literature. They may open up for a ‘broader’ understanding of this literature and make visible how it is often understood within a rather narrow national(istic) context. But they may also lead to a better understanding of what really is specific to Swedish working-class literature.

In many other countries, working-class literature is understood as a broader phenomenon than has been the case in Sweden. In research on Finnish working-class literature, for example, it is emphasized that this literature encompasses not only written and published texts, but also phenomena such as oral literature and hand-written works (Salmi-Niklander and Launis, 2015, p. 5). A similar view can also be found in contemporary U.S. research on working-class literature (Nilsson and Lennon, 2015, p. 57). Swedish research has hitherto excluded not only oral and hand-written texts, but also low-brow literature and amateur writing, as well as new literary genres (e.g. that of the graphic novel) from discussions of working-class literature (Nilsson and Lennon, 2016, p. 56; Nilsson, 2016c, p. 125).

In Finnish research on working-class literature, international perspectives have been given relatively much attention in

recent years (Salmi-Niklander and Launis, 2015). Nevertheless, the nation remains the fundamental context for the study of this literature. The author Kössi Kaatra, for instance, is described as a central character in the history of *Finnish* working-class literature, despite the fact that he lived in *Sweden* and published all his works there, from 1918 until his death in 1928 (Launis, 2015, p. 18). And, in research on Swedish working-class literature, he is not mentioned at all. Nor were – until quite recently – the Swedish working-class writers that emigrated to the USA and published their works there.<sup>13</sup> This inability to see past the context of national literature is also characteristic for contemporary research on U.S. working-class literature (Nilsson and Lennon, 2016, p. 55), as well as for research on many other working-class literatures. It also characterizes the discussions about the relationship between working-class and national literature in Sweden. For, not even those who view working-class literature as a challenge to the tradition of national literature have tried to conceptualize it as a transnational phenomenon relating more to *class* than to nations.

A history of Swedish working-class literature that incorporates the history of its construction makes visible that it is an ever-changing phenomenon existing within a vast field of potentials and possibilities. However, mapping the full extent of these potentials and possibilities entails more than this kind of (meta-) historicizing. It also requires that critics explore the conceptualizations that have not (or only seldom) been made. They can be made visible, for example, through international comparisons. Only when historical and international perspectives are combined will the questions relevant for the study of both Swedish working-class literature and working-class literature(s) in general be brought to the fore.

## Notes

1. All translations of non-English quotations are my own.
2. As will be demonstrated below, Furuland draws on earlier attempts at writing the history of this literature, and his version has been disseminated and further developed by others. For a recent overview

in English of the tradition of Swedish working-class literature, see Nilsson 2014a, pp. 18–23.

3. A similar view is also expressed in research on Finnish working-class literature (Salmi-Niklander and Launis 2015, p. 5).

4. The translation of this poem is literal and does not try to capture the aesthetic values of the original.

5. It is possible that a bourgeois discourse about working-class literature also emerged at this time. However, the task of identifying and analyzing it has yet to be undertaken.

6. As I have pointed out elsewhere, this may be a product of influence from literary discourses within the German labor movement, where the term “Arbeiterdichter” [working-class poet] referred to socialist poets of working-class background (Nilsson 2016b, pp. 80–81).

7. See Nilsson 2017.

8. For an analysis of Lo-Johansson’s writings about working-class literature, see Nilsson, 2017.

9. Regarding similar developments in Finland and Germany, see Salmi-Niklander and Launis 2015, p. 9; and Nilsson 2014a, pp. 91–98.

10. Similar arguments have also been put forward regarding Lo-Johansson by Hans Lagerberg (1991, p. 18; 2003, p. 46) and myself (Nilsson, 2003).

11. A similar development can be noted in Finland, where the topic of class has “reemerged” in recent years and where working-class literature is described by scholars as being “alive and well” (Ojajärvi, 2015, pp. 181–182; Salmi-Niklander and Launis, 2015, pp. 9–11).

12. This definition has later been further developed to also include the works’ relationships to the tradition of working-class literature (Nilsson, 2012), as well as to the labor movement and various alternative literary spheres (Nilsson, 2017).

13. The attention given to one of them – Gösta Larsson – in recent years, may, however, indicate that this is about to change. Larsson (1898–1955) was practically unknown in Sweden until Fredrik Ekelund presented him in his novel *M/S Tiden* [M/S Time] (2008). In 2011 Larsson’s best-known novel, *Ships in the River* (1946), was published in Swedish for the first time.

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