

EDITORIAL

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 turmoils of the Russian Revolution, Kaspero Tanntu’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.

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Helena Halmari