

Magnus Nilsson

Literature and Class

Aesthetical-Political Strategies
in Modern Swedish Working-Class
Literature



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Table of Contents

Introduction	7
Chapter 1: Working-Class Literature and Class	15
Chapter 2: Tradition and Literary Class Struggle: Working-Class Literature and Welfare-State Capitalism	27
Chapter 3: Class Struggle and Form: Working-Class Literature in the Era of the New Left	71
Chapter 4: Tradition and Speaking Position: Working-Class Literature and Globalized Capitalism	115
Concluding remarks	159
Bibliography	163

Jag menar med arbetare de ickexisterande som kräver sin identitet.

(With workers I mean the non-existent who demand an identity of their own.)

Ivar Lo-Johansson

Weislingen. *Ihr seht's von Eurer Seite.*

Götz. *Das tut jeder. Es ist die Frage, auf welcher Licht und Recht ist.*

(Weislingen. You view things your own way.

Götz. So does everyone. The question is, which is the right light in which they should be regarded?)

Goethe

Introduction

The aim of this book is to analyze the aesthetical-political strategies for criticizing class injustices deployed in modern Swedish working-class literature. Thus, it deals with a matter that plays a relatively marginal role in contemporary literary criticism, namely, the relationship between literature and class. Whereas the relationship between literature and phenomena such as ethnicity and gender have received massive attention in the last decades, discussions about literature and class have been rare. And *when* this subject has been addressed, it has been mainly in passing. As Julian Markels puts it, »class has become for so much recent scholarship the lip-service afterthought to gender and ethnicity.«¹ In addition to this, critics who have »rediscovered« the concept of class often deploy it in a way that diminishes its analytical potential. »In their attempts to animate the silent member of the triumvirate of race class, and gender,« Eric Shocket writes, »they take class to be an identitarian principle that names a subject position.«²

Marxists have, of course, criticized the obscuring of class within contemporary literary criticism. After all, to us, class is what matters. Marxists have also been highly critical of the conceptualizing of class as an identity or a subject position. For, as Barbara Foley puts it,

¹ MARKELS: 2003, 68.

² SHOCKET: 2009, 11.

Marxism holds that class is a social relation of production, not – or at least not primarily – a subject position. Although membership in the working class may give rise to various modes of identity, the working class is defined as class through the process of exploitation – that is, the unequal exchange of wages for labor-power that results in the production of surplus-value. The working class consists of wage slaves. While such terms as »domination« and »oppression« may adequately define various features of the experience of inhabiting a society structured along class lines – especially for women and workers of color – »exploitation« is the principal engine driving the antagonism between what Marx called the »two great warring classes, bourgeoisie and proletariat.«³

Class is the central concept in Marxist theory. The obscuring of class in contemporary literary criticism, as well as the tendency to conceptualize it in analogy with race and gender (i.e., in a non-Marxist way), has therefore been detrimental for the development of Marxist literary criticism. One of the aims of this book is to help rectify this and to take a first step toward the development of a Marxist criticism, which in Terry Eagleton's words is capable of articulating its »cultural« analyses« with a »consistent political intervention.«⁴

One contribution to this development is the exploration of how one of the most interesting strands in contemporary Marxist thought can be used in the study of literature, namely, Stephen A. Resnick's and Richard D. Wolff's anti-essentialist and dialectical Marxism. As Eagleton has pointed out, however, the development of an »adequate revolutionary cultural theory« cannot take place in the »absence of a revolutionary cultural practice.«⁵ Thus, the fact that the object of my analysis is Swedish working-class literature – which constitutes a powerful, but relatively unknown internationally, radical cultural practice – should also be seen as a part of my attempt to contribute to the development of Marxist literary criticism.

From a Marxist perspective, literary history sometimes appears to be a history about the silencing of working-class voices or about the dissemination of ruling-class ideology; this is not least the case when modern literature is the object of investigation. When discussing the existence of »oppositional cultures in our own time,« the most prominent Marxist literary critic of our time, Fredric Jameson, gives as examples »black or ethnic cultures, women's and gay literature, »naive« or marginalized folk

3 FOLEY: 2002, 28.

4 EAGLETON: 2009, 98.

5 Ibid., 97–98.

art, and the like,« and he argues that their »oppositional voices« must be reconstructed because of their silencing by hegemonic culture.⁶ That he does not mention working-class culture or working-class literature is not surprising, given its weak position in the U.S., and in most other parts of the world. Marxist scholars who do study working-class literature are often faced with questions about political and aesthetical defeat. A typical example of this can be found in Foley's study of U.S. proletarian fiction, in which she remarks that over the last fifty years »neglect« has been this literature's lot.⁷ Foley also argues that »proletarian novels are irrevocably dated in some ways,« and when arguing for the relevance of this literature for contemporary readers, she points at its capacity to portend and reflect various aspects of »the socialist fall,« and to give insights into »the limits within which 1930s Marxism was working.«⁸ And in the foreword to the anthology *Critical Approaches to American Working-Class literature*, this literature is presented as a »marginalized« one.⁹

In Sweden, working-class literature has, at least since the 1930s, enjoyed a status unparalleled in any other capitalist country, and still today, it constitutes a central strand in Swedish literature. As Rochelle Wright puts it, the »dominance, in the literary profile of the 1930s and well beyond, of writers who not only came from humble backgrounds but chose to write about their class of origin is unprecedented in Sweden and a unique phenomenon in world literature.«¹⁰ This strength makes Swedish working-class literature interesting as a possible catalyst for the development of Marxist literary theory since it confronts the Marxist critic with different questions than the ones emanating from the study of bourgeois literature or marginalized working-class literatures from other countries.

In chapter 1, I provide a theoretical and historical foundation for the analyses in the following chapters of the critique of class injustice in modern Swedish working-class literature. First, I discuss – with the point of departure in the anti-essentialist and dialectical Marxian theory developed by Resnick and Wolff – the conceptualization of literature as an *overdetermined cultural process* and a *social site* and of literary repre-

6 JAMESON: 2002, 71.

7 FOLEY: 2005, vii.

8 Ibid., viii–ix.

9 TOKARCSYK: 2011, 4.

10 WRIGHT: 1996a, 334.

sentations of class as taking part in *cultural class struggle*. Thereafter follows a short overview of the tradition of Swedish working-class literature and a brief discussion of this literature's relationship to the phenomenon of class, which is founded in, as well as illustrating/further developing some aspects of, the theoretical discussion in the first part of the chapter.

In chapters 2–4, I analyze the aesthetical-political strategies for the critique of class injustice in modern Swedish working-class literature, with the point of departure in the theoretical arguments presented in chapter 1. In order to highlight the specificity of these strategies – and of Swedish working-class literature in general – I also make comparisons with West-German working-class literature.

In chapter 2, I analyze how the representation of class in Swedish working-class literature from the era of welfare-state capitalism was conditioned by cultural processes both inside and outside of the site of literature. First, I address the question about the relationship between 1930's working-class literature and the welfare-state politics promoted by the reformist labor movement by analyzing an archetypical working-class novel from this decade, namely Ivar Lo-Johansson's *Godnatt, jord* (published in English as *Breaking free*) from 1933. Thereafter, I turn my attention to the decades following World War II, focusing on three of the most important working-class novels from this period: Folke Fridell's *Död mans hand* (Dead Man's Hand) and *Greppet hårdnar* (The Grip Gets Tighter) from 1946 and 1948 respectively, and Kurt Salomonson's *Grotorna* (The Caves) from 1956. Finally, I compare the aesthetical-political strategies in these novels to those in the most famous novel from the new wave of West-German working-class literature in the early 1960s, namely, Max von der Grün's *Irrlicht und Feuer* (Will-o'-the-Wisp and Fire) from 1963. The aim of this comparison is to demonstrate that Swedish working-class literature's strength in the site of literature has been of fundamental importance for Swedish working-class writers' literary politics, primarily by legitimizing their critique of class injustices in literary discourse.

In chapter 3, I further develop the analysis of how cultural processes both inside and outside of the site of literature overdetermine the representation of class in working-class literature. In the previous chapter, this analysis focused mainly on *literary content*. Here, more attention will be given to questions about *literary form*. In the first part of the chapter, I

analyze how the revival of Swedish working-class literature in the late 1960s and the 1970s was conditioned by the rise of the New Left. My main argument is that the New Left both helped in strengthening the tradition of working-class literature in the site of national literature and contributed to the formulation of a critique of the literary forms associated with this tradition, a critique that led many working-class writers to try to develop new formal strategies for the representation of class. This argument is illustrated with an analysis of Göran Palm's *Ett år på LM* (One Year at LM) from 1972 and *Bokslut från LM* (Closing the Books on LM) from 1974. Thereafter, I compare the developments within Swedish and West-German working-class literature in the era of the New Left, focusing on how the different status in the sites of national literature for Swedish and West-German working-class literature respectively have conditioned working-class writers' attitudes to questions about literary form. Finally, I critique the New Left's ideology critique of literary forms (which still plays an important role in Marxist theories about literature and class).

In chapter 4, I analyze how the representation of class in contemporary Swedish working-class literature has been affected by Sweden's transformation into a multicultural and post-industrial society, as well as by the political and ideological changes following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the globalization of capitalism. The main object of analysis is one of the most important contributions to the new wave of working-class literature emerging in Sweden in recent years, namely, Kristian Lundberg's *Yarden* (The Yard) from 2009. In the first part of the chapter, I analyze how the representation of class in *Yarden* is conditioned by the emergence of a new class reality – that of multicultural and post-industrial Sweden – and investigate Lundberg's relationship to the tradition of working-class literature. Thereafter, I compare the critique of temporary agency work in *Yarden* with that in Günter Wallraff's *Ganz unten* (published in English as *Lowest of the low*) from 1985. This comparison demonstrates that in the age of triumphant globalized capitalism, the disappearance of the speaking-position from which the European labor movement has formulated its class politics has made it necessary for working-class writers to re-think their aesthetical-political strategies, and that this re-thinking is conditioned by national conditions, such as the different status for working-class literature in the sites of literature in Sweden and (West) Germany respectively. My main argument is that the historical strength of Swedish working-class literature has made it possi-

ble for Swedish working-class writers to claim a speaking position *within the site of literature* and that this gives their works a greater political force than German working-class literature. In the last part of the chapter, I also argue that because of the greater possibilities of addressing questions about class and class injustice in working-class literature than in other sites in society and this literature's ability to produce new understandings of the phenomena of class and class injustice, it can be viewed as constituting an avant-garde in contemporary Swedish class politics.

In the concluding remarks, then, I summarize the outcomes of my analyses and discuss how my study can be viewed as an example of literary criticism aiming to articulate its cultural analysis with a political intervention.

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I dedicate this book to Åsa.

Chapter 1 Working-Class Literature and Class

From the perspective of the anti-essentialist and dialectical Marxism developed by Resnick and Wolff, literature can be conceptualized as an *overdetermined cultural process*.¹¹

Resnick and Wolff understand the social totality as consisting of overdetermined processes that for analytical purposes can be divided into economic, political, natural, and cultural processes. Cultural processes are defined as »processes of the production and circulation of meaning«¹² or »changes occurring in the production and dissemination of meaning in the society.«¹³ The conceptualization of the relationship between cultural processes and other processes in the social totality as being *overdetermined* means that the former cannot be understood to »contain their own conditions of existence as their essences,« and that the »specific forms« in which cultural processes exist must instead be viewed as »the combined result« of other social processes, at the same time as they are seen as containing necessary conditions of existence of other processes.¹⁴

Resnick and Wolff use class (defined as »the economic process of performing and appropriating of surplus labor«) as the »entry point« for the study of the social totality¹⁵ and summarize their view on the relationship between class and culture in the following way:

Culture is always complex, diverse, and overdetermined by many aspects of a society other than the latter's class structure. Our argument is not that a [...] class structure could or would alone determine a culture that was functional to its survival [...]. [...] We seek only to establish the point that for [...] class structures to exist and survive, their cultural context must provide some of the requisite conditions, however complicated by cultural crosscurrents.¹⁶

Class and culture are thus viewed as being »continually intertwined in an overdetermined relationship, where each combines with additional processes to provide the conditions of existence for the other,« as has been

¹¹ See AMARIGILIO, RESNICK, and WOLFF: 1988, 488.

¹² Ibid., 487.

¹³ RESNICK and WOLFF: 1996, 175.

¹⁴ AMARIGILIO, RESNICK, and WOLFF: 1988, 488.

¹⁵ RESNICK AND WOLFF: 2006, 20.

¹⁶ RESNICK AND WOLFF: 2002, 24.

pointed out by Eric Schocket, who in *Vanishing Moments: Class and American Literature* has made the hitherto most ambitious and sophisticated attempt to use Resnick and Wolff's Marxist theory as a foundation for the study of literature's relationship to class.¹⁷ Cultural processes do, in other words, actively participate in shaping the social totality, including its class processes, at the same time as they are being shaped by the other processes making up this totality.

The productive aspect of culture, its contributing to the shaping of the social totality, can be illustrated through Resnick and Wolff's analysis of their own Marxist theory as a cultural process. This theory, they argue, »operates with a notion of theory or thinking as a constituent aspect of social reality« (i.e., as an overdetermined process within the social totality).¹⁸ They also stress that theory »is about struggle and difference, rather than being a magical road to an absolute truth« and argue that theoretical struggles should be conceptualized as »struggles in which alternative frameworks, propositions, and truth criteria contest for audiences, adherents, and social hegemony.«¹⁹ Further, they argue that Marxist theory has two specific objectives: first, »to produce a class knowledge of society, to construct a kind of knowledge of the overdetermined and hence contradictory and changing social totality that focuses upon class,« and, second – which is »only partly accomplished by and through the achievement of the first« – to »help change the class structure« of the social formation.²⁰ The specific kind of change that Marxist theory tries to achieve includes »a qualitative change in the form of the fundamental class process from capitalist to communist.«²¹ What makes it possible to use theory as a tool for this kind of change is that the existence, and specific form, of class processes is »partly the effect of particular cultural processes« combining to »help secure the extraction of surplus labor,« by denying what »Marxism, a differently produced knowledge, affirms to exist in society,« namely, exploitation.²² Thus, »[a]rticulating Marxian theory, applying it to class analyses of issues, and persuading individuals of its worth are ways to

17 SCHOCKET: 2006, 41.

18 RESNICK and WOLFF: 2006, 17.

19 Ibid., 6.

20 RESNICK and WOLFF: 1989, 89–90.

21 Ibid., 161.

22 Ibid., 21.

shape society and history in a particular way: to eliminate class exploitation from them.«²³

According to Resnick and Wolff, the cultural process of Marxist theory is thus involved in class struggle,²⁴ which, as Schocket puts it, »is always also a struggle over the very terms of class analysis – a struggle over the meaning of ›class‹ itself.«²⁵ This kind (or aspect) of class struggle, I will call *cultural class struggle*.

That literary representations of class could be conceptualized in analogy with this understanding of theory (i.e., as overdetermined cultural processes involved in cultural class struggle) has been emphasized by Julian Markels. In *The Marxian Imagination: Representing Class in Literature*, which explicitly draws on Resnick and Wolff's Marxist theory, he argues that authors »stand in the same relationship to [the] world as literary and cultural theorists« in that they want to change it »through discourse.«²⁶

Conceptualizing literary representations of class as cultural processes means stressing literature's similarity with other such processes, for example, that of theory. Resnick and Wolff's theory does, however, also contain a tool for highlighting literature's specificity, namely, the concept of »social site,« which they define as »a location or grouping of *specific* relationships« that comprises »a *particular* subset of [...] processes.«²⁷

The analysis of a site begins with the distinguishing of the class and non-class processes comprising the site and proceeds with the specification of the interaction between class and non-class processes within the site and such processes at other sites of the social formation. The goal of this analysis is to »comprehend the overdetermined and hence changing contradictions« among the processes comprising the site as well as the interaction between these contradictions and »the class structure generally.«²⁸

What makes the concept of the site valuable for literary criticism is, above all, that it emphasizes literature's *relative autonomy*. Literature

23 RESNICK and WOLFF: 2006, 6.

24 RESNICK and WOLFF: 1989, 158.

25 SCHOCKET: 2006, 110.

26 MARKELS: 2003, 105.

27 RESNICK and WOLFF: 1989, 321. Emphasis added.

28 Ibid., 231.

produces meaning and is thus involved in the overall struggles over hegemony within the social totality. However, this production takes place *in the site of literature*, and hence literature's involvement in the struggles over hegemony on the level of the social totality is always mediated by the conditions within this site.

A good illustration of how literary production of meaning – and literature's participation in cultural class struggle – interacts with cultural processes both within and outside the site of literature can be found in Schocket's analysis of the attempts in mid-nineteenth century American literature to find a language for the representation of class. Schocket brings to the fore how these attempts must be related to both literary conventions and political and economic discourse:

During the 1850s [...] northern political and economic discourse was singularly unable to account for or critique class segmentation in terms of class itself. Race became an alibi: racial tropes of dependency filled the void.

A homologous displacement [...] affected the emergent literary discourse of anti-industrialism. [...] [B]y the 1850's, the language of sentimentalism and its structures of sympathy were so oriented toward issues of race and slavery that anti-industrial critique tended [...] to be made in racial terms. Hence the sentimental critique of the exploitation of labor ends up carrying the baggage of a racial logic.²⁹

Schocket's formulation about a »homologous« relationship between, on the one hand, economic and political discourse, and, on the other hand, literary discourse is unfortunate since it produces an image of literature as lacking relative autonomy from other sites within the social totality. Nevertheless, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, his conceptualization of literary processes as interacting with conditions both within and outside of the site of literature is of fundamental importance for the understanding of the relationship between literature and class.

Swedish Working-Class Literature: A Brief Introduction

The tradition of working-class literature has been described as one of Sweden's few original contributions to world literature.³⁰ What makes this characterization appropriate is, above all, the fact that in Sweden working-class literature has enjoyed a much higher status in the site of

²⁹ SCHOCKET: 2006, 38.

³⁰ See FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 15.

national literature than in any other (capitalist) country. As Lars Furuland and Johan Svedjedal put it, working-class literature has been a »bred litterär strömning i Sverige, starkare och mångsidigare än i de nordiska grannländerna, England, Frankrike, Tyskland och Ryssland« (broad literary current in Sweden, stronger and more diverse than in the other Nordic countries, England, France, Germany and Russia).³¹ This literary strength was established in the 1930s, when working-class literature constituted the very center of Swedish literature, and since then, it has contributed to »att sätta programmet för svensk litteratur« (setting the agenda for Swedish literature).³²

Working-class literature first emerged in Sweden in the last decades of the nineteenth century, at which time it was produced, distributed, and read almost exclusively within the labor movement and conditioned by the cultural infrastructure within this movement.³³ The aim of this literature was primarily to propagate labor-movement politics and to promote proletarian class consciousness.³⁴ The dominant genres during this period were poetry and songs, and the main means for distribution were labor-movement newspapers and leaflets.³⁵ At this time, working-class literature was characterized by a high degree of collectivism: authors were often viewed as mouthpieces for the labor movement rather than individual creators of texts; texts were often read aloud or sung at political meetings; political effectiveness was generally considered to be more important than artistic originality.³⁶ Some of the most important working-class writers from this period were the poet and playwright Leon Larson³⁷ (1883–1922); Henrik Menander (1853–1917), who wrote the lyrics to the best-known Swedish labor-movement song, *Arbetets söner* (Sons of Labor) and translated *The International* into Swedish; Maria Sandel (1870–1927), who published both poetry and short stories; and the poets Atterdag Wermelin (1861–1904) and Karl Johan Gabrielsson (1861–1901), the latter usually writing under the pen name »Karolus.«

31 Ibid., 25. All translations of non-English quotations are my own.

32 Ibid., 15.

33 See HOLMGREN: 1982, 64; MRAL: 1985, 13–15; FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 44; NILSSON: 2006a, 36.

34 See MRAL: 1985, 15.

35 See FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 55–56; NILSSON: 2006a, 36–39.

36 See HOLMGREN: 1982, 63–64; NILSSON: 2006a, 36–37.

37 Sometimes spelled »Larsson«.

Early in the twentieth century, the labor movement's cultural infrastructure was transformed and expanded through the founding of publishing houses, which made it possible for more and more working-class writers to publish prose fiction.³⁸ Around 1910, Swedish working-class literature had its first breakthrough in the site of national literature when a group of proletarian writers – among them Karl Östman (1876–1953), Alfred Kämpe (1877–1936), Gustav Hedenvid-Eriksson (1880–1967), Martin Koch (1882–1940), Dan Andersson (1888–1920), and the aforementioned Sandel and Larson – became successful among both critics and readers, mainly with realistic prose works about the working class, which were often published by commercial publishing houses.³⁹ In part, this breakthrough was made possible by changes in the site of national literature, such as an increased interest among readers and critics in realism, or the fact that several commercial publishers began targeting the working class as potential buyers of literature.⁴⁰ Another factor that contributed to the breakthrough was that the labor movement's increased political strength and the rapid industrialization of Sweden generated an increased interest among bourgeois readers in literature about the working class.⁴¹

Parallel to this breakthrough in the site of national literature, new literary sub-sites emerged within various left-wing labor organizations, where the development of working-class literature was often marked by explicit antagonism towards the dominant ideals in the site of national literature.⁴² One of the most important of these sub-sites was centered on the socialist magazine *Brand* (Fire)⁴³ and another on the magazine *Stormklockan* (The Tempest Bell), in which poets such as Ture Nerman (1886–1969), Harry Blomberg (1893–1950), and Ragnar Jändel (1895–1939) published a large number of poems.⁴⁴

During and after World War I, interest in working-class literature diminished in the site of national literature, mainly because of a shift in the dominant aesthetic ideals, which now, as Ola Holmgren puts it became

38 See NILSSON: 2006a, 43–44; FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 78–79.

39 See UHLIN: 1950, 210–211; NILSSON 2006a, 49.

40 See UHLIN: 1950, 227–276.

41 See NILSSON: 2006a, 50–54.

42 See *ibid.*, 55–56.

43 See FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 106–109; HILLBORN: In press.

44 See STENKVIST: 1985, 64–67.

decidedly bourgeois.⁴⁵ As a result of this, several working-class authors disassociated themselves from the tradition of working-class literature, whereas others retreated from the site of national literature to sub-sites within the labor movement.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the 1920s was also a period during which a new generation of working-class writers gathered momentum and prepared to conquer Parnassus.⁴⁷

Around 1930, Swedish working-class literature had its definite breakthrough in the site of national literature, establishing itself as a central strand in modern Swedish literature.⁴⁸ Göran Therborn puts it thus:

In Sweden, the 1930's was the time of the rise and overwhelming success of »Proletarian literature.« On a broad front, a whole series of autodidact writers of working class background stepped forward and came to occupy the literary centre, among critics and serious readers alike, with a voluminous production of more or less autobiographical novels.⁴⁹

The most important of these writers were Moa Martinson (1890–1964), Vilhelm Moberg (1898–1973), Rudolf Värnlund (1900–1945), Eyvind Johnson (1900–1976), Ivar Lo-Johansson (1901–1990), Harry Martinson (1904–1978), and Josef Kjellgren (1907–1948). As Therborn points out, the archetypical genre of the period was the autobiographical proletarian Bildungsroman.⁵⁰ Other important genres were realistic and modernist prose fiction, modernist poetry, and various kinds of documentary prose.⁵¹

After World War II, many of the working-class writers of the 1930s continued to hold dominant positions in the site of national literature.⁵² This is evidenced, for example, by the fact that three of them – Lundkvist, Johnson, and Harry Martinson – were elected members of the Swedish Academy and that the latter two of these were awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in their capacity as representatives of »det uppbåd av proletärförfattare eller arbetardiktare, som på bred front bröt sig in i vår littera-

45 HOLMGREN: 1982, 62.

46 See FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 146–158; NILSSON: 2006a, 58–62.

47 See FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 216.

48 See *ibid.*, 216–219; NILSSON 2006a, 63–73.

49 THERBORN: 1985, 585.

50 For a discussion of this genre in relation to Barbara Foley's analysis of U.S. proletarian fiction in *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929–1941* (FOLEY: 2005), see Jimmy Vulovic's *Ensamhet och gemenskap i förvandling: Vägar genom Eyvind Johnsons och Rudolf Värnlunds mellankrigsromaner* (VULOVIC: 2009, 214–217).

51 See NILSSON: 2006a, 64.

52 See *ibid.*, 74; NILSSON 2011, 184.

tur [...] för att berika den med sina förmögenheter»⁵³ (the many proletarian writers or working class poets who, on a wide front, broke into our literature [...] to enrich it with their fortunes).⁵⁴ During this period, the working-class writers of the 1930s also managed to reach out to large numbers of readers, often through cheap editions of their pre-World War II works distributed through cultural organizations associated with the labor movement.⁵⁵ However, at the same time, younger working-class writers were frequently marginalized in the site of national literature.⁵⁶ One reason for this was that the working-class writers from the 1930s enjoyed such a strong position in the site of literature that it was hard for a new generation to attract attention from readers and critics, and another was that the reformist spirit that accompanied the emergence of the welfare state led to a general de-radicalization of the intellectual climate both in society at large and in the site of literature.⁵⁷ Yet another reason was that the aesthetic ideals in the site of literature changed rapidly during the immediate post-war era. At the time, formal experimentation and cultural pessimism were in vogue, not the realistic and political ambitions with which much of the working-class literature from the 1930s was associated.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, a new generation of working-class writers emerged, the most important representatives of which were Folke Fridell (1904–1985) and Kurt Salomonson (born 1929), who during the decades after World War II published several novels focusing on class injustice in the Swedish welfare state,⁵⁹ and the poet Stig Sjödin (1917–1993), whose breakthrough collection of poetry, *Sotfragment* (Fragments of Soot) from 1949, explores similar themes.⁶⁰

During the late 1960s and the 1970s, a general revival of working-class literature occurred.⁶¹ Some of the writers from this period – for example, Maja Ekelöf (1918–1989), Sara Lidman (1923–2004), Göran Palm (born 1931),

53 LINDBERGER: 1990, 447.

54 GIEROW: 2010.

55 See FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 233–236 and 507–515.

56 See NILSSON: 2006a, 74.

57 FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 220.

58 See NILSSON: 2006a, 75.

59 See BLOM: 1978, 94–122; FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 254–265 and 305–308; NILSSON: 2006a, 78–80.

60 See FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 271–272 and 275–280.

61 See *ibid.*, 316; NILSSON: 2006a, 81–87.

Hans Lagerberg (born 1943), Bunny Ragnerstam (born 1944), and Henning Mankell (born 1948) – used documentary or modernist forms, whereas others – such as Ove Allansson (born 1932), Kjell Johansson (born 1941), Reidar Jönsson (born 1944), Aino Trosell (born 1949) and Torgny Karnstedt (born 1952) – mainly published realist prose fiction. This revival was intimately connected to the rise of the New Left. Above all, the increased interest among readers and critics in working-class literature during this period can be seen as a consequence of an increased general interest in the working class caused by the New Left's promotion of socialist politics.⁶² Moreover, the New Left's publishing houses and publications provided a cultural infrastructure that both made possible the emergence of a new generation of working-class writers and strengthened the position of older working-class literature.⁶³

In the 1980s, the demise of the New Left was paralleled by a downturn for working-class literature, whose status in the site of literature now reached an all-time low.⁶⁴ However, in the 1990s, a number of working-class authors – among them Elsie Johansson (born 1931), Kjell Johansson, Aino Trosell, and Majgull Axelsson (born 1947) – started getting positive reviews from leading critics,⁶⁵ and after the turn of the millennium, working-class literature has once again become a central strand in Swedish literature.⁶⁶ Among the most important contemporary Swedish working-class writers are Susanna Alakoski (born 1962) and Åsa Linderborg (born 1968), who had their breakthroughs in 2006 and 2007 respectively with autobiographical novels, and Kristian Lundberg (born 1966), who claimed his place in the tradition of Swedish working-class literature in 2009 with the publication of *Yarden* (The Yard), an experimental prose-narrative about the author's experiences of temporary agency work. Besides realistic novels and experimental prose fiction, other important genres in contemporary Swedish working-class literature are modernist and post-modernist poetry – represented by, for example, Johan Jönson (born 1966), Emil Boss (born 1979), and Jenny Wrangborg (born 1984) – and documentary or semi-documentary texts, represented, for example, by Maria Hamberg (born 1954) in her earlier work.

62 See *ibid.*, 84.

63 See FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 317–318; NILSSON: 2006a, 84.

64 See FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 372; NILSSON: 2006a, 87–88.

65 See FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 372–373.

66 See WILLIAMS: In press.

Working-Class Literature and the Cultural Production of Class

The brief description above of the tradition of Swedish working-class literature shows that it is highly heterogeneous and that it has not developed within a single site. The poems and songs produced within the labor movement in the late nineteenth century, for example, have little in common with the autobiographic proletarian novels from the 1930s, and these, in turn, are often very different from the works published by contemporary working-class writers. The description also shows that despite the tradition of working-class literature being stronger in Sweden than in most other countries, the story about this tradition is one about fluctuating successes and failures. Every breakthrough in the national site of literature, it seems, has been followed by periods of marginalization.

That the tradition of Swedish working-class literature is heterogeneous indicates that it is not constructed around some stylistic or ideological essence, but is instead made up of literary texts, which, at different times, for different reasons, and in different sites, have been defined as working-class literature.⁶⁷ What these definitions have had in common is that they have been made when connections between literary texts and the working class have *played a dominant role in the text's reception*.⁶⁸ However, the nature of these connections have varied over time: early working-class literature was mainly connected to the working class through its association with the labor movement; the realistic working-class literature from the first decades of the twentieth century and the autobiographical proletarian fiction of the 1930s were linked to the working class both by way of their thematic focus on working-class life and through the authors' class backgrounds; in the 1960s and 1970s, the authors' class backgrounds were often less relevant, whereas working-class political partisanship became more important; today the authors' backgrounds seem to be of about equal importance as their thematic focus on the working class, whereas explicit political partisanship has become less important.

The establishing by readers of connections between literary texts and the working class is thus a necessary condition of existence for working-class literature. That such connections are made, and that they play an im-

⁶⁷ See NILSSON: 2006a, 24; NILSSON: 2006b, 165.

⁶⁸ See NILSSON: 2006a, 25–26; NILSSON: 2006b, 165–166.

portant role for the reception of literature, is more likely when the working class is considered to be important in public or literary discourse. Thus, it is not surprising that interest among Swedish readers and critics in working-class literature has generally been higher during periods characterized by economic and political crises in which the working class and the labor movement have played important roles, and questions about class, consequently, have received increased attention.⁶⁹ For example, the first breakthrough for Swedish working-class literature outside the labor movement coincided with a period of economic and political struggle, culminating in the general strike of 1909. Even though this strike ended in defeat, it did show that the labor movement was well on its way to becoming a major force in Swedish politics, and this generated an interest in the working class, which, in turn, resulted in a demand for literary texts describing this class and a proclivity among readers for making connections to the working class an important factor in their reception of these texts.⁷⁰ In the 1930s, the situation was similar. This was the decade when the reformist labor movement had its definite breakthrough and began building the Swedish welfare state⁷¹ and the »ascent of the proletarian writer« did indeed, as Wright puts it, correlate »with the rise to dominance of the Social Democratic party.«⁷² In the late 1960s and the 1970s, it was, as will be discussed further in chapter 3, the emergence of the New Left (as well as an increase in working-class militancy) that boosted public interest in the working class and generated renewed interest in working-class literature.⁷³ During periods when the left has been ideologically weak and the interest in questions about class has been low in the public sphere, on the other hand, these questions have also received less attention in the site of literature,⁷⁴ thereby negatively affecting the conditions of existence for working-class literature.

The very existence of Swedish working-class literature could thus be viewed as a result of processes outside the site of literature generating an

69 As has been demonstrated by Ian Haywood, this is true also in Britain, where the political situation has often been of vital importance for the interest in working-class literature. (HAYWOOD: 1997, 38).

70 See NILSSON: 2006a, 53.

71 See *ibid.*, 69.

72 WRIGHT: 1996a, 334.

73 See NILSSON: 2006a, 81; MATTSSON: 2009.

74 See GREIDER: 1994, 9.

increased interest in the working class, thereby making possible the reception of literary texts as *working-class literature*. At the same time, however, working-class literature too can be understood as a process involved in the *cultural production of class*. The working-class literature produced within the labor movement in the late nineteenth century, for example, clearly aimed at highlighting questions about class injustice and fostering class consciousness among workers, and, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, the same can be said about most of the working-class literature produced throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Hence, working-class literature contributes to one of its conditions of existence, namely, the interest in the public sphere and the site of literature in the working class. The relationship between Swedish working-class literature and (other) processes for the cultural production of class is, in other words, overdetermined.

Chapter 2

Tradition and Literary Class Struggle: Working-Class Literature and Welfare-State Capitalism

The Swedish welfare state began being built in the 1930s, had its golden age in the decades following World War II, and started to show signs of breaking down in the 1970s. As a social formation, it is best understood as what Therborn has called a »*popularly organized Capitalism*.«⁷⁵

One of the necessary conditions of existence for this social formation was a relative marginalization in public discourse of questions about class⁷⁶ and the assertion of »a hegemonic reformist consensualism in Swedish politics and Swedish society«⁷⁷ that helped produce what Graham Cassano has called a »corporatist imagining of the social totality« as a »social whole,« where »individuals are bound together through a web of mutual obligations,« and where class relations, consequently, are not understood to be antagonistic.⁷⁸ As Åsa Linderborg has shown, the reformist, social-democratic labor movement was one of the main forces behind the production of this understanding of the phenomenon of class, arguing that the emergence of the welfare state meant the end of class conflict.⁷⁹ With the point of departure in this idea, the social-democratic labor movement constructed a history-narrative in which the first decades of the twentieth century were viewed as an epoch marked by exploitation and class antagonism, whereas the welfare-state era was constructed as an antithesis to the past along the lines of the corporatist imagining of the social totality.

75 THERBORN: 1985, 586. Emphasis in the original.

76 See HALLBERG and JONSSON: 1996, 149; FRYKMAN and LÖFGREN: 1985, 20; LINDERBORG 2001.

77 THERBORN: 1985, 573.

78 CASSANO: 2009, 480. My use of Cassano's concept of »the corporatist imagining of the social totality« does not imply that I view the Swedish welfare state as a corporatist society. For a critical discussion of the applicability of the concept of corporatism in analyses of the Swedish welfare state, see THERBORN: 1985, 58–59. I do, however, find Cassano's concept adequate for describing a central aspect of the hegemonic understanding of class relations during the era of welfare-state capitalism in Sweden. Support for this view can be found in HALLBERG and JONSSON: 1996, 148–149, 170, and in FRYKMAN and LÖFGREN: 1985, 133.

79 LINDERBORG: 2001, 330–331, 394.

Apology or Critique?

According to Therborn, Swedish working-class literature from the 1930s contributed to the production of the corporatist imagining of the Swedish welfare state. He argues that most of the autobiographic proletarian novels from this decade were set in the past, that in them »[o]pen class struggles were either absent or marginal,« and that they »tended to end in an individual escape [...] from the class.« »In short,« Therborn writes, »the proletarian writers described Old Sweden in its poverty and harshness, now in the process of disappearing« with the rise to political leadership of reformist politicians, »who like the new writers had risen from poor working class backgrounds.« Thus, he claims, the function of Swedish working-class literature of the 1930s was to give reformist politics »an ideological force, vitality and penetrating pervasiveness far beyond what appears from parliamentary victories.«⁸⁰ Similar views have also been expressed by several other commentators. Wolfgang Butt, for example, argues that »die Struktur dieser autobiographischen Romane« (the structure of these autobiographical novels) displayed »eine auffallende Homologie zur gleichzeitigen gesellschaftlichen Situation in Schweden [...], in der das Volksheim Gestalt anzunehmen begann« (a marked homology with the contemporary social situation in Sweden [...], in which the welfare state began taking shape), and Peter Graves and Philip Holmes describe Swedish working-class literature of the 1930s in the following way:

By the 1930s the emphasis of working-class writing was firmly back on the individual and this is reflected in the genre that many of the generation favoured. One after another they produced autobiographical novels in which they described their early lives and struggles and attempted to come to terms with their backgrounds. To an extent this change in emphasis [away from »the forwarding of the demands of the working-class for political and social equality«] may be explained by changed social conditions – many of the things that the earlier generation had been demanding had been achieved, and with the existence of the beginnings of social democracy much of the rest could be expected.⁸¹

As Althusser has pointed out, however, »there is no such thing as an innocent reading.«⁸² Just like literary texts themselves, interpretations of

80 THERBORN: 1985, 586.

81 BUTT: 1982, 324; GRAVES and HOLMES: 1978, 173. See also HOLMGREN: 1982, 65–69; FORSER: 1993, 148; FORSER et al.: 1972, 173.

82 ALTHUSSER and BALIBAR: 2009, 14.

such texts are cultural processes that are overdetermined by the social totality, including processes for the cultural production of class. Therefore, the interpretation of Swedish working-class literature from the 1930s as contributing to the corporatist imagining of the Swedish welfare state needs to be further analyzed.

Philippe Bouquet's view of the relationship between Swedish working-class literature and the triumphant social democracy of the 1930s is quite the opposite of the one put forward by Therborn. He argues that the rise of Swedish social democracy during this decade would have made it easy for Swedish working-class writers to adopt the role of official historiographers or common apologists, but that they instead choose to become critics of the reformist labor movement.⁸³

One important aspect of their critique was, as has been noted by Linderborg, the highlighting in working-class literature of questions about class, which was »besvärande« (embarrassing) to a labor movement committed to the corporatist imagining of the social totality.⁸⁴ This is probably one of the reasons for the fact that the reformist labor movement often regarded the working-class literature of the 1930s with indifference, or even hostility.⁸⁵ Later, however, this changed, and instead of criticizing or ignoring working-class literature, the labor movement came to view its breakthrough in the site of national literature as a symbol for the democratization of Swedish society brought about by the social-democratic welfare-state politics.⁸⁶

The shifting attitudes within the reformist labor movement towards Swedish working-class literature from the 1930s, as well as the conflicting interpretations of this literature by scholars, indicates that its relationship to the corporatist imagining of class characteristic of the Swedish welfare state is indeed open to interpretation. In the following, I will demonstrate this by analyzing what is today considered to be an (or even the) archetypical Swedish working-class novel from the 1930s, namely, Ivar Lo-Johansson's breakthrough novel *Godnatt, jord* (published in English as *Breaking free*), from 1933.

83 BOUQUET: 1980, 18.

84 LINDERBORG: 2001, 323.

85 See NILSSON: 2006a, 68; NILSSON: 2011, 186.

86 See *ibid.*

The reformist labor movement's attitudes to Lo-Johansson and his novel follow the general course described above. As Furuland has pointed out, the initial response had two tendencies.⁸⁷ Some critics within the labor movement celebrated the text as a powerful condemnation of the class injustices suffered by the rural working class. However, several labor movement representatives denounced it for being too pessimistic, as well as for maligning working-class people, and the most important cultural organization within the reformist labor movement, *Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund* (The Workers' Educational Association), even went as far as promoting a novel written as a direct reply to, and repudiation of, the critique in *Godnatt, jord* of the exploitation of the rural working class.⁸⁸

Godnatt, jord tells the story of a boy, Mikael, growing up in the rural proletariat during the first decades of the twentieth century. His milieu is described as traditional and backward, and it is juxtaposed with urban modernity⁸⁹ as well as with political ideas associated with the welfare state.⁹⁰ A socialist agitator, Brontén, tries to organize the farm laborers in a trade union, but because of their hostility towards all modern ideas, this attempt fails.⁹¹ The novel ends with Mikael breaking free from his childhood milieu and leaving his family for a future in the city,⁹² where he wants to pursue his dream of becoming an artist.⁹³

Thus, it may seem reasonable to read *Godnatt, jord* along the lines of Therborn's description of working-class literature from the 1930s: as a novel which is set in the past, in which overt class struggle is absent, which ends with an individual's escape from the (rural) working class, and whose (autobiographical) description of the protagonist's struggle to become an author allegorically represents the reformist labor movement's rise to power. The following quotation from one of Lo-Johansson's programmatic essays on working-class literature – in which he accuses this literature of telling stories about individual escapes, rather than portray-

87 FURULAND: 1976, 74.

88 See *ibid.*, 73–75.

89 See BETHKE: 1967, 105 and III–II3; WRIGHT: 1992a, 55.

90 See NILSSON: 2003, 23–47.

91 See *ibid.*, 34.

92 See WITT-BRATTSTRÖM: 1988, 204; NILSSON: 2003, 36.

93 See MISCHLIWIETZ and NILSSON: 2011, 13.

ing class struggle, and for focusing more on their authors' individual careers than on the masses – could also be read as a self-critical statement justifying such a reading:

Man skulle ha kunnat tro att massorna skulle få sitt inträde i svensk litteratur genom arbetarförfattarna. Detta har skett i ytterst få fall. Den självbiografiska, individualistiska romanen har haft sina företrädare just bland arbetarförfattarna.

Det har berott på att arbetarförfattarna själva en gång lösryckt sig ur massan, och att lösryckandet för dem har inneburit en svår personlig kamp. Den starkt individualistiska romanen har för dem ursprungligen varit ett medel, medlet att bli författare. En litteratur om hur man blir författare kan ju emellertid inte vara litteraturens mening.

(One could have believed that through the working-class authors, the masses should have gained access to Swedish literature. This has happened only in very few cases. The autobiographical, individualistic novel has had its representatives above all among the working-class authors.

The reason for this is that the working-class authors themselves once broke free from the masses, and that this breaking free for them meant a hard personal struggle. The strongly individualistic novel was for them originally a means, the means for becoming an author. But a literature about how to become an author cannot be literature's purpose.)⁹⁴

However, the fact that self-criticism was never a prominent feature of Lo-Johansson's writing indicates that this formulation is probably intended as critique of *other* working-class writers. As I and Sandra Mischliwietz have demonstrated elsewhere, an analysis of *Godnatt, jord* also shows that it is not an individualistic novel about someone breaking free from his class, but that the description of Mikael's coming of age symbolizes, rather, the potential for the rural working class to transform from a class in itself to a class for itself.⁹⁵ More important than this, however, is the fact that in *Godnatt, jord*, Lo-Johansson explicitly criticizes the idea of the welfare state being the antithesis to an older order characterized by class-antagonism,⁹⁶ thereby undermining the history-narrative underpinning the reformist labor movement's corporatist imagining of society.

Several times in *Godnatt, jord*, Lo-Johansson brings to the fore the idea of a transformation of Sweden from a class society into a democratic and egalitarian society. One example of this is his description of how »[d]et började glida utför« ([t]hings were beginning to go downhill) for

94 LO-JOHANSSON: 1946, 188.

95 MISCHLIWIETZ and NILSSON: 2011, 10–11. For a discussion of the concepts of »class in itself« and »class for itself,« see chapter 4 in this book.

96 See NILSSON: 2003, 189–190.

the aristocracy, as they moved towards »samförstånd med proletärerna, mot förfall« (fraternizing with the common folk, towards downfall and defeat).⁹⁷ But this description is, consequently, juxtaposed with images of how old power structures live on beneath the surface. In a scene describing a harvest home, for example, Lo-Johansson attributes »en demokratisk blick« (a democratic touch) to a baroness.⁹⁸ But he also describes her as someone who is very much aware of her inherited position of power: »Nu skred hon fram över gräset med en nedärvd förnämhet och grandezza, i sina tankar medveten om hur hon vandrade på klassisk mark, där hon alltjämt rönt rädsla och beundran« (Now she strode across the grass with an inherited elegance and grandezza, conscious of the fact that she was walking on ancestral ground where she still evoked fear and admiration).⁹⁹ In the description of the baroness' conversation with the laborers it is also made clear that the new democratic spirit is both superficial and temporary:

Friherrinnans ton hade redan liksom dragit åhörarna upp och flyttat herrskapet ner, tills de allesammans närmade sig samma plan i en känsla av samförstånd [...]. Men alla kände samtidigt utjämningen som något tillfälligt, de kände den som en [...] stund av nåd.¹⁰⁰

(The baroness's tone of voice had already seemed to elevate the listeners while lowering the gentry until they all approached the same level, brought together by a feeling of mutual understanding [...]. But at the same time everyone felt this equalization to be temporary; they experienced it as a [...] moment of grace.)¹⁰¹

This moment of grace then ends brutally when the socialist agitator Bron-tén makes a speech in which he argues that beneath the new democratic atmosphere and the talk about how masters and laborers jointly »bruka[r] jorden« (till the soil), bound together by »gamla hävder och gamla sedvänjor« (old traditions and ancient customs),¹⁰² the estate workers continue to be exploited:

97 LO-JOHANSSON: 1933, 484. English translation from LO-JOHANSSON: 1990, 371.

98 LO-JOHANSSON: 1933, 227. English translation from LO-JOHANSSON: 1990, 170.

99 LO-JOHANSSON: 1933, 226. English translation from LO-JOHANSSON: 1990, 169.

100 LO-JOHANSSON: 1933, 228.

101 LO-JOHANSSON: 1990, 171. Translation modified.

102 LO-JOHANSSON: 1933, 231–233. English translation from LO-JOHANSSON: 1990, 174–175.

Till det som sagts om skörden och till allt det vackra som blommar på jorden, ville jag lägga några meningar om statarnas jord. Jag ville tala om fallfärdiga bostäder, om lungsoten och om ohyran där – han gjorde en gest mot statarlängornas svankryggiga tak, vilka just förgylldes av solen – utan detta är inte tallet om statarnas jord fullständigt! Detta må tillåtas också på en fest ...¹⁰³

(»With reference to what's been said about the harvest, and concerning all the beautiful things that blossom from the soil, I'd like to add a few sentences about the soil of the estate-workers. I'd like to talk about buildings that are about to fall down, about tuberculosis, and about the bugs in there« – he gestured toward the swaybacked roofs of the barracks, which at that moment looked golden in the sun. »A speech about the soil of the estate-workers that doesn't mention these matters is incomplete. Surely this is permissible even during a feast ...«)¹⁰⁴

Brontén's speech certainly constitutes an attack on the corporatist imagining of society. At the same time it can be read as a meta-literary statement about the role of working-class literature: to confront hegemonic ideology from a proletarian perspective. Thus, Lo-Johansson does not only criticize the corporatist understanding of Swedish society but also constructs his identity as a working-class writer in opposition to it.

In 1947, the communist critic Per-Olof Zennström described Lo-Johansson as a reformist writer for whom the transformation of the semi-feudal rural proletariat into unionized wage workers was the ultimate goal of political struggle.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, even if Lo-Johansson did entertain a close relationship with the reformist labor movement,¹⁰⁶ and even if he was a supporter of the welfare state,¹⁰⁷ he did not subscribe to the idea that the emergence of the welfare state meant the end for class struggle;¹⁰⁸ instead, he lamented the fact that the reformist labor movement had abandoned its class-struggle perspective¹⁰⁹ and that the goal for the farm worker's trade union appeared to be limited to transforming their members into »individualister« (individualists), adopting the life style of »kälkborgare« (the petite bourgeoisie).¹¹⁰ Hence, it could be argued that it is a

103 LO-JOHANSSON: 1933, 235.

104 LO-JOHANSSON: 1990, 177.

105 ZENNSTRÖM: 1972, 218.

106 See FURULAND: 1976, 162–200.

107 See NILSSON: 2003, 193.

108 See *ibid.*, 188 and 194.

109 See ADOLFSSON: 1992, 100.

110 EDSTRÖM: 1976, 154.

specific *interpretation* of Lo-Johansson's work – and of Swedish working-class literature from the 1930s in general – rather than this work, as such, that fulfills the ideological task of expressing and promoting the corporatist imagining of the social totality that was a necessary condition of existence for Swedish welfare-state capitalism.

The Discontent of the Modern Machine Servant

That the aesthetical-political strategies in Swedish working-class literature from the decades following World War II were conditioned by the hegemonic corporatist understanding of the welfare state gets a clear expression in two of Folke Fridell's novels: *Död mans hand* (Dead Man's Hand) from 1948, and *Greppet hårdnar* (The Grip gets Tighter) from 1948.

The main theme in these novels is a critique of modern industrial labor; however, the nature of this critique has been debated. According to Per-Olof Mattsson, Fridell expresses an anarchistic critique of industrialism, which idealizes small-scale manual production.¹¹¹ On the other hand, Jan Erik Bornlid, Tomas Forser, and others argue that it is not industrialism but capitalism that is under attack by Fridell.¹¹² Moreover, according to Bill Sund, Fridell is trying to demonstrate that the problems experienced by workers in Swedish industry are a product of the economical-political system of welfare-state capitalism.¹¹³

One important point of departure for the description and critique of workers' conditions in Swedish industry in Fridell's novels is the Marxist labor theory of value and a critique of capitalist exploitation founded on this theory. This can be seen, for example, in the protagonist's (the textile worker David Bohm) description of labor in *Död mans hand* as »inkörsporten till rikedomens paradiset« (the gateway to the paradise of wealth)¹¹⁴ and in his insistence that it is he and his co-workers who have made the owner of the factory where they work rich.¹¹⁵ That these ideas are expressions of a Marxist understanding of the economic process of class is signaled by several allusions to Marx's theoretical writing, such as when

111 MATTSSON: 2009, 117–118.

112 BORNBLID: 1979, 123; FORSER et al.: 1972, 164–165.

113 SUND: 1999, 114.

114 FRIDELL: 1946, 46.

115 Ibid., 104–105.

Bohm brings to the fore Marx's theory about how increased productivity makes possible the realization of »extra profit,«¹¹⁶ by describing work studies as a means for producing »merprofitens gyllne frukter« (the golden fruits of surplus profit).¹¹⁷ The novels' mutual critique of exploitation is summed up in a comment in *Död mans hand* by Bohm's (who is the protagonist also in *Greppet hårdnar*) workmate Fyll-Larsson (Larsson the drunk), during a break on the night shift. »Man borde vara med om att dela och bestämma« (One should be allowed to share the profits and have a say), Fyll-Larsson says, »[d]et skulle nog hjälpa« (that would probably help).¹¹⁸

Bohm's discontent in the world of labor is not only a reaction to exploitation; it is also an expression of dissatisfaction with the industrial work process, and, like the critique of exploitation, this dissatisfaction is formulated in a way that reveals influence from Marx's analysis of capitalism. Bohm's lamentation that, as a worker, he is transformed into »ett halvmänskligt inventarium« (a semi-human fixture), a »livstidstjänare« (servant for life) to the machines,¹¹⁹ and that the machine rips »det mänskliga« (what is human)¹²⁰ out of workers reverberates, for example, with Marx's description in *Capital* of how, under capitalism, it is »the instruments of labour that employ the workman,«¹²¹ turning him into a machine »for the fabrication of surplus value.«¹²² Bohm's complaint that his work is »fullständigt fritt från tankearbete« (completely free from brain work), and, thus, from »arbetsglädje« (joy of labor),¹²³ also resonates with Marx's argument that, under capitalism, »factory work [...] confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and intellectual activity,« thereby depriving work of »all interest.«¹²⁴ Yet another example of the proximity of Bohm's discontent with his work to Marx's description of how capitalism transforms the production process can be found in the following passage:

¹¹⁶ See HEINRICH: 2012, 107.

¹¹⁷ FRIDELL: 1946, 195.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹²¹ MARX and ENGELS: 1995, 426.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 403.

¹²³ FRIDELL: 1946, 48.

¹²⁴ MARX and ENGELS: 1995, 425–426.

När jag allra först började som rivare fanns det litet omväxling. Då fick man själv hämta sitt gods i magasinet, hjälpa till med uppvägningen och talja upp balarna till rivlokalen. Då kunde man också ta sig en minut då och då för det fanns bara mänsklig kontroll och den kan man alltid lura. Numera är det särskilda arbetare som sköter allt förarbete. Godset kommer till oss och vi har bara att sträcka ut handen och ta. Något smussel med tiden går inte.

(When I first started as a shredder, there was still some variety. Then one had to get one's own material from the warehouse, assist in the weighing, and hoist up the bales to the shredding room. Then one could also take a minute every now and then, because there was only human control, and that can always be duped. Nowadays special workers take care of all the preparatory work. The material comes to us, and we just have to reach out a hand and take it. Cheating with the time is impossible.)¹²⁵

This resembles Marx's description in *Capital* of the effects of increased specialization:

An artificer, who performs one after another the various fractional operations in the production of a finished article, must at one time change his place, at another his tools. The transition from one operation to another interrupts the flow of his labour, and creates, so to say, gaps in his working day. These gaps close up so soon as he is tied to one and the same operation all day long; they vanish in proportion as the changes in his work diminish. [---]. [C]onstant labour of one uniform kind disturbs the intensity and flow of a man's animal spirits, which find recreation and delight in mere change of activity.¹²⁶

For Marx, the degradation of labor caused by increased specialization and the use of machinery cannot be separated from the capitalist class relations. In *Capital*, for example, he explicitly argues for the necessity »to distinguish between machinery and its employment by capital,« and to make »not [...] the material instruments of production, but [...] the mode in which they are used,« the object of struggle.¹²⁷ This is also Fridell's view,¹²⁸ expressed in *Död mans hand*, for example, in the description of Bohm's intellectual development. At first he thinks that it would be »roligt« (fun) to pick up a sledgehammer and destroy the machines,¹²⁹ but eventually he realizes that it is better to try to »tämja« (tame) them.¹³⁰ He also connects such a taming with the abandonment of the capitalist

¹²⁵ FRIDELL: 1946, 73.

¹²⁶ MARX and ENGELS: 1995, 345–346.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 432.

¹²⁸ See FORSER et al.: 1972, 178.

¹²⁹ FRIDELL: 1948, 115.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 119.

class relations, as evidenced by his insistence that it is a logical consequence of his demand that workers should be allowed to »vara med och dela och bestämma« (share the profits and have a say).¹³¹

In *Död mans hand* and *Greppet hårdnar*, one thus finds a Marxist critique of capitalism, rather than a romantic critique of industrialism. And this critique is formulated in direct dialogue with the hegemonic understanding of class in the Swedish welfare state. This is hinted at in the blurb on the back cover of *Död mans hand*, where it says that the concept of the »folkhem« (welfare state) is not compatible with the »verklighet« (reality) that the reader will encounter in this novel. And in the novel, Bohm repeatedly juxtaposes the corporatist imagining of the Swedish welfare state with his own experiences, arguing that these do not match, as in the following passage, in which he assumes the role of mouthpiece for his workmates and argues that

[t]rots folkhem och rösträtt och höjd levnadsnivå så fortsätter vi råttor att pipa vår ynklighetssång. Vår värdelöshet, vår lättersättlighet, vår stigande enfald kväver oss till döds bland maskiner och löpande band.

Det är vidunderligt att tänka sig en demokrati på ett sådant underlag.

(despite welfare state, suffrage, and an increased standard of living, we rats continue to squeak our song of misery. Our worthlessness, our exchangeability, our increasing stupidity is suffocating us here among machines and conveyor belts.

Imagining democracy on such basis is ridiculous.)¹³²

As Furuland has pointed out, this passage is an example of Fridell's explicit challenging of »den socialdemokratiska reformismen« (social-democratic reformism),¹³³ and it is precisely this ideology that is the target for most of Fridell's attacks against the welfare state. As in the quotation above, these attacks often focus on two concepts central to reformist political strategies during the period of welfare-state capitalism, namely, *democracy* and *standard of living*.¹³⁴ In both *Död mans hand* and *Greppet*

¹³¹ Ibid. This idea is also explicitly formulated in an article where Fridell argues that as a socialist he views the degradation of workers to machine-servants as a product of private ownership of the means of production, and claims that »socialistiska och koopererande produktionsformer« (socialist and cooperative forms of production) would »göra maskinen till betjänt och människorna kring den till människor« (turn the machine into a servant and the humans surrounding it into humans (FRIDELL: 1970, 41).

¹³² FRIDELL: 1946, 54.

¹³³ FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 262.

¹³⁴ See JUL NIELSEN: 2004, 69 and 126.

pet hårdnar, Bohm repeatedly contrasts the reformist understanding of these concepts with the socialist ideal to which he is committed – that workers should be allowed to share the profits and have a say – and finds that they do not live up to his standards.

In *Greppet hårdnar*, Bohm's critique of the welfare-state version of democracy gets its clearest expression in his discussion of an attempt to introduce industrial democracy at his workplace. At first, Bohm is rather skeptical, but after asking a union representative for a definition of the concept of democracy, and getting the answer that it is »styrelse av folket, genom folket, där folket väljer sin styrelse och kontrollerar denna« (government by the people, through the people, where the people elect and control their rulers),¹³⁵ he gets his hopes up: »Betyder demokrati att folket väljer och kontrollerar så måste industriell demokrati betyda att vi jobbare väljer och kontrollerar. Då blir det som Fyll-Larsson ville ha det i alla fall: vi får vara med och dela och bestämma« (If democracy means that the people elect and control, then industrial democracy must mean that that we workers elect and control. Then it will be like Fyll-Larsson wanted after all: we will be allowed to share the profits and have a say).¹³⁶ Soon, however, he becomes disappointed, for the welfare-state version of industrial democracy does not challenge the capitalists' ownership of the means of production. And for Bohm, this makes true democracy impossible: »Så länge de äger råder det diktatur – också om vi i nåder erhåller rätten att råda diktatorerna« (As long as they own, dictatorship prevails – even if we are granted on sufferance the right to advise the dictators).¹³⁷

For Bohm, welfare-state democracy is thus not the same thing as the right for workers to »have a say.« Further, the increased standard of living, enjoyed by workers in the Swedish welfare state, is not the same thing as »sharing the profits.« For, in the welfare state, this increased standard of living comes at a price, namely, the acceptance of capitalist class relations, and, hence, of the capitalist organization of the work process. In *Greppet hårdnar*, this idea is presented through the description of Bohm's reactions to an article written by one of the »allra största« (very greatest) representatives of the Swedish labor movement, in which it is claimed that the labor movement isn't interested in »produktionens

¹³⁵ FRIDELL: 1948, 148.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 149.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 155.

form« (the form for production), only in its »effektivitet« (efficiency), and that the »[f]öretagsresultatet, inte företagsformen« (the company's result, not the corporate form) is what matters.¹³⁸ For Bohm, however, the forms for production and the corporate form matter indeed. For him, capitalist production reduces workers to machine servants, and this is something that cannot be compensated by an increased material standard of living. »[V]i har köpt vår mättnad dyrt« (We have bought our satisfaction at a high price), he argues: »Vi skulle erövra fabrikerna och köra ut ägarna eller låta dem jobba som vi [...] Men ägarna är kvar i allsköns välmåga och pöser nu som bäst om hur väl de ordnat allt åt sina anställda« (We were to take over the factories and chase away the owners or let them work as we work [...]. But the owners remain in the best of health, and are busy boasting about how well they have arranged things for their employees).¹³⁹ For Bohm, these arrangements are not at all satisfying. He suspects that the workers have sold »friheten« (the freedom) for »trettio silverpenningar« (thirty pieces of silver).¹⁴⁰ »Nu vill man göra oss rika först och fria sen« (Now, they want to make us rich first, and free later), he says, »men vem vet om vi någonsin blir så rika?« (but who knows if we ever get that rich?).¹⁴¹

Here, Bohm challenges the narrative about the welfare state putting an end to class antagonism. What has disappeared, he claims, is not class antagonism, but the labor movement's commitment to class struggle.

The Machine Servant's New Song

In Fridell's novels, the emergence of the welfare state is described as the emergence of a new class reality. A good example of this can be found in the following passage from *Död mans hand*:

Det är sant att vi inte är så fattiga längre. Inte om man bara tänker på mat och en säng att ligga i. Kvävningsgreppet kommer inte från den hålgrynande nöden. Vår generations svältkonstnärer dö mätta på samhällets kaloririka och effektiviserade pensionärsinrättningar. [...] Vi är kamrater och får en medalj

¹³⁸ Ibid., 131. As has been pointed out by Blom, Fridell here comments on an authentic article written by the social-democratic politician and later Noble Laureate economist Gunnar Myrdal, who is generally viewed as one of the founding fathers of the Swedish welfare state (BLOM: 1978, 136).

¹³⁹ FRIDELL: 1948, 163–164.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 214.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 214.

om halsen i stället för silkessnöret. Vi sitter i samma båt som herrarna [...]. Men den hjärtliga kamratatmosfären kväver oss genom sin falskhet, sin stinkande osannolikhet. Och bakom hjärtligheten ligger föraktet bart och skälvannde. Vi har rösträtt och vitaminrik föda med föraktets giftgas tränger mot oss som en obotbar sjuka.

(It is true that we are not so poor anymore. Not if you think about food and a bed to sleep in. It is not the wry-faced distress that holds us in a strangle-hold. The starvation artists of our generation are full when they die in society's calorie-rich and rationalized pensioners' homes. [...] We are comrades with medals, rather than silk strings, around our necks. We all sit in the same boat with the masters [...]. But the cordial comrade atmosphere of comradeship suffocates us through its falseness, its stinking incredibility. And behind the cordiality lies naked shivering contempt. We have the right to vote and vitamin-rich food, but the poison gas of contempt advances on us, like an illness for which there is no cure.)¹⁴²

Here the phenomena democracy and increased standard of living – symbolized by the formulation about »rösträtt och vitaminrik föda« (the right to vote and vitamin-rich food) – are placed at the center of the new class reality of the welfare state. However, the ironic tone in the description of how workers and masters are »kamrater« (comrades), sitting »i samma båt« (in the same boat), as well as the explicit arguing that the »hjärtliga kamratatmosfären« (cordial comrade atmosphere) is characterized by »falskhet« (falseness) and »osannolikhet« (incredibility), shows that this reality does not just consist of a new set of economic and political conditions but also of a specific understanding of these conditions: an understanding that obscures the phenomena of class and class injustice.¹⁴³

This is further thematized in *Död mans hand* and *Greppet hårdnar* in repeated descriptions of how the phenomenon of class has been made almost un-representable by the hegemonic understanding of the Swedish welfare state as a society free from class antagonism. A good example of this is the characterization in *Död mans hand* of the worker as an »okänd typ av folkhemskamrat« (unknown type of the welfare-state com-

¹⁴² FRIDELL: 1946, 180–181.

¹⁴³ The metaphor »sit in the same boat« in this quotation is probably an allusion to the famous rowboat at the mansion Harpsund. Harpsund is the Swedish prime minister's country retreat, and in the decades following World War II, it came to symbolize welfare-state consensus because of the many informal meetings held there between the social-democratic prime minister, Tage Erlander, and representatives for the trade unions and the employers' organizations, meetings that often included an outing in the prime minister's rowboat.

rade).¹⁴⁴ Because of the hegemonic idea about workers and capitalists being ›comrades,‹ the worker cannot be known, at least not as someone having antagonistic interests to capital.

Fridell does not just thematize the subaltern status for his Marxist understanding of class in relation to the hegemonic understanding of this phenomenon in the welfare state, and the resulting near-impossibility of representing it, but he also demonstrates how his commitment to class politics clashes with hegemonic *literary* ideals. One example of this can be found in a formulation in *Död mans hand* about

industriarbetarens stora tragedi, som de lärda vill blunda för och som medelmåttorna flinar åt; [...] ropet från den moderna tidens grottekvarnar, som inte kan bli något mäktigt rytande men som finns där ändå för den som är lyhörd [...].

(the great tragedy of the industrial worker, that the learned want to close their eyes to, and that the mediocrity sneer at; [...] the cry from the Grotti mills of the modern age, that cannot become a mighty roar, but still exists for him who has a sensitive ear [...].)¹⁴⁵

This barely audible cry, Bohm argues, is »skriet från miljoner människor i livsnöd« (the cry from millions of people in distress), but it only »når den självbelåtna som råttornas ynkliga pipande« (reaches the smug as the miserable squeaking of rats).¹⁴⁶ What makes this a highlighting of the working class' invisibility in literature is Fridell's reference to the Grotti mill. In Nordic mythology, this is an enormous magical mill, operated by two giant female slaves, grinding gold for the greedy king Frodi. In Sweden, however, it is best known from Viktor Rydberg's poem *Den nya Grottesången* (The New Grotti Song) from 1891, where it is used as a symbol for capitalist exploitation.¹⁴⁷ The formulations about how the learned do not want to hear, how the mediocrity sneer at the cries from the modern Grotti mills, and how it requires a sensitive ear to hear these cries could thus be interpreted as a thematization of the obscuring of class in the site of literature. Whereas Rydberg managed to transform the myth about the Grotti mill into a poem about the exploitation of workers

¹⁴⁴ FRIDELL: 1946, 104.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 53.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 54.

¹⁴⁷ A telling indication of the status of this symbolism is the claim by the social-democratic minister of finance, Ernst Wigforss, that it was Rydberg's poem, rather than Marx's theories, that made him a socialist (WIGFORSS: 1950, 123).

during early industrialism (i.e., turn class injustice into a literary motif), the distress experienced by workers in the modern Grotti mills gets expressed only as a barely audible squeaking.

A similar thought is put forward by Fridell in *Greppet hårdnar*, in which Bohm compares himself and his work mates to »[t]omtar« (gnomes) and claims that whereas gnomes can inspire »stora diktare« (great poets), no poems are written about workers, partly because they are too »skitiga« (dirty) and partly because of the fact that there is a sign on the door to their »tomtenäste« (gnome nest) saying »tillträde förbjudet« (no admittance).¹⁴⁸ In this passage, Fridell highlights that the sphere of capitalist exploitation – the »hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there stares us in the face ›No admittance except on business‹,« as Marx puts it – is out of reach for literary representation.¹⁴⁹ And once again, he does so by way of a reference to Rydberg. For, *Tomten* (The Gnome) is one of Rydberg's most well known poems.

The references to Rydberg in *Död mans hand* and *Greppet hårdnar* serve the purpose of expressing an experience of not being able to turn experiences of modern capitalist industrial labor and the class injustices characteristic of such labor into literature. However, even though Rydberg may be the most visible literary dialogue partner in Fridell's novels, he does not play the most important role in discussion in these of the (im)possibilities to represent class in literature. This role is played, instead, by the tradition of working-class literature.¹⁵⁰ For the thematization in *Död mans hand* and *Greppet hårdnar* of the problems associated with turning critique of class injustice into literature is constantly intertwined with a discussion of the status of working-class literature in the Swedish site of literature in the 1940s.

This discussion is epitomized in the description of the writer-worker Bohm. The narrative situation in *Död mans hand* is that Bohm writes his life story. This brings to the fore several questions about the relationship

¹⁴⁸ FRIDELL: 1948, 153.

¹⁴⁹ MARX and ENGELS: 1995, 186.

¹⁵⁰ Rydberg is generally not considered a member of the tradition of Swedish working-class literature. Nevertheless, he did enjoy great popularity within the labor movement during the late nineteenth century (see FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 66–67). Moreover, many working-class writers display influence from Rydberg (see *ibid.*, 67). This is not the least true for Fridell, as indicated by the references to Rydberg discussed above, but also by title of his debut novel from 1945: *Tack för mig – Grottekvarn* (Thank You and Goodbye – Grotti Mill).

between literary ideals and working-class literature. Already on the second page of the narrative, for example, Bohm argues that there is something disturbing about his writing. »Här sitter jag nu och skriver om mig själv« (Here I sit, writing about myself), he says, »precis som om jag vore en högst märkvärdig människa« (just as if I were a really remarkable person.) »Men det är jag inte alls« (But I'm not), he continues, »[b]ara en vanlig arbetare« (I'm just an ordinary worker).¹⁵¹ In Bohm's view, writing about one's life is something that is reserved for remarkable people, and workers are not remarkable, but ordinary. Thus there seems to be a friction between Bohm's role as a writing worker and dominant literary ideals – a friction between *working-class literature* and *Literature*.

This idea is spelled out in the following passage, in which Bohm speculates about what would happen if anyone were to read his story:

Finurliga kritiker skulle hånfullt tala om busspråk och olitterär generalisering. Man skulle finna kompositionen haltande och okonstnärlig och räkna efter hur många gånger jag använt uttrycket skittrasor.

Och kritiken har naturligtvis alldeles rätt. Det här är ingen litterär konstprodukt; skitpratet dominerar alldeles för mycket och det vore kanske mer berättigat att [...] kalla kompositionen för k o m p o s t i o n. Det här är en deklARATION från bottenskiktet och där finns inga litteratörer med söta små konstord i munnen.

(Clever critics would talk with contempt about hooligan language and non-literary generalization. One would find the composition limping and un-artistic and count the number of times I've used the expression filthy rags.

And the critics would, of course, be right. This is no literary artistic product; the filth-talk dominates way too much, and maybe it would be justified [...] to call the composition c o m p o s t i n g. This is a declaration from the lowest layer and there one finds no literary men with cute little art-words in their mouths.)¹⁵²

As Blom has demonstrated, this passage should be read as a reaction to the criticism directed at Fridell's debut novel.¹⁵³ Nevertheless it is also of relevance for a more general thematization in Fridell's novels of the relationship between working-class literature and the hegemonic aesthetic ideals within the site of literature.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ FRIDELL: 1946, 6.

¹⁵² Ibid., 202–203.

¹⁵³ BLOM: 1978, 60.

¹⁵⁴ This view finds support in Blom's argument that Bohm's discussion of aesthetics in the passage above is further elaborated in Fridell's programmatic articles about working-class literature, which will be discussed later in this chapter (ibid., 60).

This discussion of the status for working-class writers and working-class literature is continued, and expanded, in *Greppet hårdnar*, which has been characterized as a »metaroman« (meta-novel) discussing the reception of *Död mans hand* and explicitly engaging in dialogue with literary criticism.¹⁵⁵ On the first page of this novel, the reader is informed that Bohm's writings have been published and that he has been invited to an »exklusiv samtalsklubb« (exclusive conversation club), where representatives of the local bourgeoisie are to discuss and critique his writing.¹⁵⁶ This makes Bohm feel awkward. It feels, he says, like he has »frivilligt lovat bort sig att obduceras levande« (volunteered to undergo an autopsy while still alive), and he asks himself what business »en gammal lumprivare« (an old rag-shredder) has with »noblessen« (the noblesse).¹⁵⁷ In other words: as a working-class writer, Bohm does not feel at home in the world of literature.

Bohm suspects that what will be discussed and critiqued in the literary conversation club is not really his aesthetics, but his politics – his demand that workers should be allowed to share the profits and have a say.¹⁵⁸ This suspicion is confirmed. The discussants try, for example, to convince Bohm that the machines, not the fact that capitalists own them, are the cause of his discontent.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, this political critique is often articulated in aesthetic terms. »Det finns folk som kallar detta för litteratur« (There are people who call this literature), an academic guest member of the club says, but to himself, Bohm's text presents itself as »degeneration« (degeneration).¹⁶⁰ »Litteratur« (Literature), he concludes, is supposed to »lyfta« (uplift) and »inspirera« (inspire) the reader, but Bohm's story can be of interest only to »människor med dålig smak« (people with bad taste).¹⁶¹ Bohm's story is, in other words, declared to be the anti-thesis of literature. Nevertheless, this aesthetic critique is, at heart, political. The filth which cannot be tolerated in literature is the working-

¹⁵⁵ WIRTÉN: 2000, 216–217.

¹⁵⁶ FRIDELL: 1948, 5.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 23.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. As has been pointed out by several commentators, this critique resembles the one directed at Fridell's debut novel by the critic Sven Stolpe. See FORSER et al.: 1972, 172; BLOM: 1978, 124.

class' experience of the injustices characteristic of capitalist industrial production.

Fridell's thematizing of working-class literature's status in the site of literature is indicative of an important shift in the class reality facing working-class writers in the 1930s and the 1940s respectively. During the former decade, the critical representations of class and class injustice by working-class writers such as Lo-Johansson may have been subaltern in relation to the hegemonic corporatist imaging of the Swedish welfare state. However, within the relatively autonomous site of literature, these writers enjoyed a high status. In the 1940s, on the other hand, the status of working-class literature in the site of literature was lower than in the previous decade. And since writers' interventions in cultural class struggle are always mediated through the site of literature, this *literary weakness* impacted negatively the effectiveness of working-class literature in cultural class struggle.

Fridell's response to the declining status for working-class literature is a call for renewal of it, articulated in a series of programmatic articles. In »Arbetarna och proletärdikten« (The Workers and Proletarian Writing) from 1947, he argues for »en förnyelse av proletärlitteraturen« (a renewal of proletarian literature), aiming at placing this literature »i [...] centrum bland nuets problemkomplex« (at the [...] heart of contemporary society's problems),¹⁶² and in the brochure *Nya mål för arbetardikten* (New Goals for Working-Class Writing) from 1948, he further specifies his argument by claiming that older working-class writers are out of touch with contemporary class reality:

Vet vi allt om modern arbetstillvaro? Har arbetardikten sökt sig till botten eller är den diktarbild som en gång skapades tillräckigt klar för att klargöra skeendet också av idag?

Jag tror det inte. Den moderne maskinbetjäntens frihetssång är inte skriven än.

(Do we know everything about contemporary labor existence? Has working-class writing penetrated through to the bottom, or is the literary image that was once created clear enough to clarify today's events as well?

I do not think so. The modern machine-servant's song has yet to be written.)¹⁶³

The reason for working-class literature's inability to penetrate to the bottom of contemporary working-class existence, Fridell claims, is the emer-

¹⁶² FRIDELL: 1970, 24

¹⁶³ Ibid., 37.

gence of a new class reality. In part, this new reality seems to be that of modern industrial labor. Swedish working-class literature in the 1930s was often set in the countryside, focusing mainly on the rural proletariat; however, Fridell writes primarily about industrial labor. This was uncommon at the time,¹⁶⁴ and it has even been argued that Fridell is the first Swedish working-class writer to describe and criticize modern, automated, and rationalized industrial production.¹⁶⁵ However, what above all makes Fridell argue that older working-class literature is out of touch with contemporary working-class reality is the emergence of the welfare-state.

Older Swedish working-class literature, Fridell claims, »reagerade främst mot den ekonomiska fattigdomen« (has reacted, above all, against economic poverty).¹⁶⁶ But today, this kind of reaction is obsolete, or even counterproductive:

[D]en skapar servilitet och falsk förnöjsamhet. Dess enda uppgift ligger i det registrerande, historiskt relaterande reportaget. Som impulsgivare och visionär framtidsskapare saknar den värde [...].

Nuets proletärdiktning får inte stanna vid uppgiften att historiskt beediga en gången tids usla standardförhållanden och därmed – omedvetet eller inte – överidealiserar nuets relativt kaloririka proletärbetingelser.

(It creates servility and false contentment. Its sole purpose lies in the registering, historically relating reportage. As a giver of impulses and visionary creator of future it lacks all value [...].)

Contemporary proletarian writing must not stop at the task to give testimony about past times' miserable conditions, and thus – unconsciously or not – idealize the contemporary, relatively calorie-rich, proletarian conditions.¹⁶⁷

What Fridell argues here is that a failure to recognize that the welfare state has changed the context for literary class struggle may result in working-class writers becoming apologists for the idea that class antagonism has been abolished. Fridell further underlines this later in the article:

Den gamla proletärdiktningens signum var protesten mot fattigdomen. Detta utgjorde dess styrka, men också dess begränsning och konservatism. [---]

Den gamla proletärlitteraturen bekämpade fattigdomen. Den lyckades bidra till att ge oss mer kalorier och kortare arbetstid [...]. Ett fortsatt refererande av

¹⁶⁴ See FORSER et al.: 1972, 164; BORNLIID: 1979, 117.

¹⁶⁵ See *ibid.*, 122.

¹⁶⁶ FRIDELL: 1970, 24.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

den tidens fattigdom kommer att ge en otidsenligt delikat inramning åt en blänkande hygienisk men grotesk tvätthokkultur.

Därmed växer också den servila självbelåtenheten; draperiernas veck tättnar framför ett skälvande eländestillstånd.

(The hallmark of older proletarian writing was the protest against poverty. Herein lay its strength, but also its limitation and conservatism. [---])

Older proletarian literature fought poverty. It managed to contribute to giving us more calories and a shorter workday [...]. A continued relation of the poverty of that time will give an anachronistically delicate framing to a shining and hygienic, but grotesque, laundry sink-culture.

This causes the servile contentment to grow; the folds in the hangings get thicker in front of a shivering condition of misery.¹⁶⁸

A continuation of the tradition of working-class literature along the lines established in the 1930s would thus not only result in this literature getting out of touch with contemporary class reality, but it would also be counterproductive from the perspective of working-class politics since it would make invisible the injustices experienced by the working-class in this new reality.

In other words, Fridell formulates a critique similar to the one put forward by Therborn, namely, that older working-class literature contributes to the hegemonic self-understanding of the Swedish welfare state as a class-less society. However, Fridell is not arguing that working-class literature from the period before the establishing of the welfare state was not radical when it was first published, only that its class-political radicalism was connected to a political context no longer in existence, and that it may, therefore, now be *interpreted* as supporting the history narrative about the welfare state having put an end to class injustice. Furthermore, he argues that such an interpretation is actively promoted by representatives of the reformist labor movement by putting the following words in the mouths of »[a]rbetarörelsens ansvarstygda män« (the responsibility-laden men of the labor movement): »Så var det förr – varsågod och läs proletärlitteraturen [...] och se skillnaden« (That's how it used to be – please read the proletarian literature [...] and see the difference).¹⁶⁹

Bill Sund has pointed out that Fridell's novels from the mid-1940s »ogillades av många inom de etablerade kretsarna till höger och vänster« (were disliked by many within established circles both on the right and

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 25–26.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 26.

on the left).¹⁷⁰ What was disliked was, above all, the politics promoted in these novels. Fridell's socialist ideals were, for example, criticized in both the social-democratic and the communist press, and the only newspaper in which *Död mans hand* got a positive review was the syndicalist *Arbetaren* (The Worker).¹⁷¹ Side by side with the political critique there was, moreover, also a critique of Fridell's aesthetics. This has made some commentators argue that the debates about Fridell's writing from the 1940s took place on two levels. On one level, they argue, Fridell was viewed as a critic of class relations in the Swedish welfare state; on another, he was seen as a critic or innovator of Swedish working-class literature.¹⁷² However, as has been demonstrated above, Fridell's socialist critique of the Swedish welfare state and his calls for a renewal of the tradition of working-class literature are intimately connected.

A Struggle Below the Surface

In the novel *Grottorna* (The Caves) from 1956, the working-class writer Kurt Salomonson tells the story about Ambjörn, a former journalist who gains new insights into the Swedish class society after becoming a mine-worker. These insights lead to him formulating a critique of Swedish welfare-state capitalism, which much resembles the one put forward in Fridell's novels from the 1940s.¹⁷³

As in Fridell's novels, the representation and critique of class and class injustice in *Grottorna* is founded in Marxist theory. A good illustration of this can be found in the following conversation between Simon, a mineworker suffering from silicosis, and his boss:

Simon blev stel av ilska, men han behärskade sig.
 – Det är för fan inte mitt fel att jag är sjuk, sade han.
 – Vems fel är det, om jag får fråga? sade platschefen.
 – Det behöver jag knappast tala om, sade Simon.
 – Ni menar att det är bolagets fel, sade platschefen, men då tar ni fel. Ingen tvingade er när ni började i gruvan; ingen har någonsin tvingat er att stanna kvar.

¹⁷⁰ SUND: 1999, 108.

¹⁷¹ See FORSER et al.: 1972, 162 and 167.

¹⁷² See *ibid.*, 167.

¹⁷³ See BLOM: 1978, 162–164.

(Simon became stiff from anger, but restrained himself.
 – It is for fuck’s sake not my fault that I’m ill, he said.
 – Whose fault is it? if I may ask, the branch manager said.
 – That’s hardly something I have to tell you, said Simon.
 – You mean that it is the company’s fault, the branch manager said, but then you’re mistaken. Nobody forced you when you started working in the mine; nobody has ever forced you to stay.)¹⁷⁴

This conversation illustrates Marx’s argument in *Capital* that the free proletarian, the »untrammelled owner of his capacity for labour,«¹⁷⁵ is someone »who is bringing his own hide to the market and has nothing to expect – but a hiding.«¹⁷⁶ The branch manager’s insistence that his job is »att tänka som gruvförvaltare, inte som människa« (to think as a mine manager, not as a human being)¹⁷⁷ also brings to the fore Marx’s insistence that the relationship between workers and capitalists is not a relationship between individuals, but between economic roles, expressed in his formulations that the capitalist is »capital personified« and that it is »only because his money constantly functions as capital that the economic guise of a capitalist attaches to a man.«¹⁷⁸ Salomonson’s novel also brings to the fore Marx’s critique of the capitalist labor process, for example, in the description of a journalist asking some miners if they ever get the feeling that they are »maskiner och inte människor« (machines and not human beings).¹⁷⁹

The critique of class injustice in *Grottorna* is – again like the critique in Fridell’s novels – formulated in dialogue with the hegemonic understanding of the welfare state as a society in which class injustice and class antagonism have been abolished. That Ambjörn’s encounter with class injustice takes place in a mine – underground – is symbolically significant. For in *Grottorna*, class injustice is often described as a phenomenon that is invisible to most people. For example, shortly after his arrival at the mine, Ambjörn is told by the company doctor that people don’t know »vad som rör sig under ytan« (what is going on beneath the surface).¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ SALOMONSON: 1956, 70–71.

¹⁷⁵ MARX and ENGELS: 1995, 178.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 186.

¹⁷⁷ SALOMONSON: 1956, 72.

¹⁷⁸ MARX and ENGELS: 1995, 164 and 566.

¹⁷⁹ SALOMONSON: 1956, 114.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 33.

What is keeping class injustice »beneath the surface« is the hegemonic belief that the welfare state has put an end to class antagonism. This is made clear, not least, by the juxtaposition in *Grottorna* of the central concepts in the rhetoric about the class-less welfare state (democracy and standard of living) with the reality experienced by the miners. A good example of this can be found in a scene describing a confrontation between the miners and the mining company's general manager over the company's decision to deport workers suffering from silicosis to another plant. »Jag är ingen diktator« (I am not a dictator), the manager says: »Var och en får välja. Men jag hoppas att jag gjort klart att förflyttningen under alla omständigheter kommer att äga rum – för dem som inte väljer att sluta, vill säga« (Everyone has a choice. But I hope that I've made it clear that the transfer will take place, no matter what happens – for those of you who do not chose to quit, that is).¹⁸¹ After stating his commitment to democracy (i.e., declaring that he is not a dictator) the manager invokes the workers' relatively high standard of living: »Går det nöd på er och era kamrater? frågade direktören. Svälter ni?« (Are you and your comrades not well off, asked the manager. Are you starving?).¹⁸² Both democracy and the workers' standard of living are thus used by the manager as a means for defusing a potential conflict between labor and capital; however, this rhetoric is also explicitly criticized. For example, the manager's insistence on his commitment to democracy is undermined by his own admission that the company has already made its decision, and thus that the workers have no say, as well as by the counterargument made by one of the workers, namely, that quitting is no option since nobody will employ »silikosare« (people suffering from silicosis).¹⁸³ The manager's reference to the workers' standard of living is also juxtaposed with one of the worker's claim that it has come at a high price, namely, the workers being degraded to »råttor« (rats) crawling »till den bästa ostkanten« (toward the best cheese-rind).¹⁸⁴

The hegemonic corporatist imagining of the Swedish welfare state conditioned the reception of *Grottorna*. Its critique of class injustices was often met with skepticism, above all from the reformist labor move-

181 Ibid., 93.

182 Ibid., 99.

183 Ibid., 94.

184 Ibid., 99.

ment,¹⁸⁵ and this critique often took the form of a denial that such injustice could exist in the welfare state.¹⁸⁶ One example of this can be found in a review in the social-democratic newspaper *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* (The Norrland Social Democrat). »Står det verkligen så till i dagens Sverige?« (Is this really the state of affairs in contemporary Sweden?) the reviewer, Sture Andersson, asks (rhetorically) and then continues: »Svaret måste bli nej. Sådana missförhållanden som dem Salomonson radar upp i sin bok har man svårt för att föreställa sig existerar. Man får ett intryck av att handlingen utspelas vid sekelskiftet i stället för i dagens Sverige« (The answer has to be no. It is hard to imagine that wrongs of the kind lined up by Salomonson in his book exist. One gets the impression that the story is set at the turn of the century, instead of in contemporary Sweden).¹⁸⁷

In the second edition of *Grottorna* from 1958 – a cheap edition, intended for mass distribution to workers through the publisher Folket i Bild – Salomonson made additions to the novel that further accentuated his commitment to socialist class politics. The main part of these additions, which have been included in every edition of *Grottorna* published after 1958, is a chapter (number XXII) included towards the end of the book. It opens with a description of Ambjörn lying on his bed, reading. After a while, he starts contemplating what he has learned from working in the mine:

En gång trodde han på lögnen om samhällsklassernas utjämning. Han trodde att det kroppsarbetande folkets seger efter de stora hungeråren skulle föra med sig ett liv bortom den förbittrade klasskampens stenkummel. Det var länge sedan. Det var ett par år sedan. Nu insåg han att det inte fanns något utjämning i samhället; han insåg att kampen mellan klasserna slipats av, blivit förfinad; det var en kamp under ytan.

En gång hade han också trott på kamratskapet i ett stort arbetslag. Han hade trott på de band som förenade till exempel människor i en gruva som denna [...]: han hade trott på den [sic.] och bytt yrke (också av andra tvång förstås) för att förena sig med ›hederliga‹ människor. Även här hade han tagit fel.

(Once he believed in the lie about the leveling out of the differences between the social classes. He believed that the manual laborers' victory after the years of the great hunger would result in a life beyond the bitter cairn of class struggle. That was a long time ago. It was a couple of years ago. Now he realized

¹⁸⁵ See JOHANSSON: 2011, 148.

¹⁸⁶ See JOHANSSON: 2013, 46–47.

¹⁸⁷ ANDERSSON: 1956.

that there was no leveling in society; he realized that the struggle between the classes had had its edge ground off, become polished; it was a struggle going on beneath the surface.

Once he had also believed in the comradeship in a large team of workmen. He had believed in the bonds uniting, for example, people in a mine like this [...]: he had believed in it [sic.] and changed his occupation (also because of other compulsions, of course) in order to unite with ›honest‹ people. Here too, he had been mistaken.)¹⁸⁸

Here, several themes that have already been discussed above are highlighted. The first of these is a critique of the idea that the welfare state has put an end to class antagonism. That it is this idea that is described as »the lie about the leveling out of the differences between the social classes« is not least made clear by the fact that Salomonson connects this lie with the concepts of democracy and standard of living, through his formulations about »the manual laborers' victory« (representing the reformist labor movement's political breakthrough) and the end of »the years of the great hunger« (representing the material improvements for workers in the welfare state). The second theme that is revisited in this passage is that of lacking proletarian class consciousness. Even if Ambjörn may have seen through the lie about the leveling of society before coming to the mine, what he has learned from the mineworkers is that they believe in it, and that, therefore, they are unable to develop class consciousness and class solidarity.

After contemplating the corporatist imagining of the Swedish welfare state, Ambjörn starts thinking about the deportation of mineworkers suffering from silicosis:

Tvångsförflyttningen var ett brott mot de mänskliga rättigheterna. De som igångsatt den bar sig åt som förbrytare, men de hade dock brottslingens vanligaste bevekelsegrund: de tjänade sig själva, de tjänade ett syfte, som de själva ansåg var fördelaktigt. Med fackföreningen var det annorlunda. Genom att inte ställa sig på de hjälplösa offrens sida accepterade den en ordning som motarbetade fackföreningens grundprincip, det vill säga rättvisa åt alla, jämlikhet åt alla.

(The deportation was a crime against human rights. Those who had initiated it acted like criminals, but they at least had the criminal's usual inducement: they were egoistic, they did it because they believed it served a purpose, which they believed they could benefit from. The union was different. By not siding with the helpless victims, it accepted an order that was the opposite to the union's fundamental principle of justice for all, equality for all.)¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ SALOMONSON: 1958, 198–199.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 199–200.

Here, it is emphasized that Ambjörn holds both the company and the union responsible for the encroachment on the workers' human rights and that his critique is a critique both of the capitalists' greed and of the union's inability to challenge the capitalist system that is built on it.

A little later Ambjörn proceeds to elaborate on his critique of the union, remembering how he has asked a union representative how deportations of workers can be allowed »i ett civilicerat land« (in a civilized country):

– Hur det kan förekomma, sa han. Ja, det är ju en fråga. Som jag ser hela historien så är den en följd av tidens krav på ökat tempo, ökad prestanda; ett bolag som detta har helt enkelt inte råd att låta ett tjugotal karlar drälla omkring för halv maskin. När det finns ett ställe där deras möjligheter till produktivt arbete bättre tillgodoses, anser jag det självklart att ett bolag som detta måste företa operationen, hur smärtsam och obehaglig den än kan tyckas.

(– How it can be allowed, he [the union representative] said. Well, that's a question. The way I see this whole story, it is a consequence of the demands in our age for increased tempo, increased performance; a company like this quite simply cannot afford letting twenty or so people loaf about at half speed. If there is a place where they can be better provided with possibilities for productive work, I think it is natural that a company like this must carry out the operation, however painful and unpleasant it may appear.)¹⁹⁰

In this passage, it is further underlined that the critique of class injustice in *Grottorna* is formulated from a Marxist position: that it concerns the reformist labor movement's commitment to the capitalist mode of production, which, in Marx's words, results in the worker having to work »under the control of the capitalist« who has bought his labor power and in the slogan »Accumulate, accumulate!« becoming »Moses and the prophets.«¹⁹¹

In the latter part of the chapter, then, the company doctor comes to visit Ambjörn, who accuses the doctor of having let »arbetarna gå nere i gruvan« (the workers stay down in the mine), despite knowing that they were ill.¹⁹²

Salomonson's reason for including this chapter in the second edition of *Grottorna* was that he felt the need to »ytterligare betona bilden av fackföreningens och företagsläkarens svek mot de silikosdrabbade arbe-

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 202–203.

¹⁹¹ MARX and ENGELS: 1995, 195 and 591.

¹⁹² SALOMONSSON: 1958, 208.

tarna« (further emphasize the image of the union's and the company doctor's betrayal against the workers suffering from silicosis),¹⁹³ or, in other words, to criticize both the capitalist (the mining company) and the reformist labor movement (the union). Thus, the additions to the 1958 edition could be seen as a reaction against attempts to appropriate the novel for a liberal critique of Swedish welfare-state capitalism (i.e., a critique focusing on the union's betrayal of its members while ignoring capital's crimes).¹⁹⁴

Several commentators have noted the similarities between Fridell's and Salomonson's representations of class,¹⁹⁵ and the general view among literary historians is that both writers, as Per-Olof Mattsson puts it, participated in leading working-class literature on to »ett delvis annat spår än tidigare« (a partially new track) during the decades following World War II.¹⁹⁶ However, Carl-Eric Johansson has claimed that Salomonson's status as an innovator of the tradition of working-class literature has been established in retrospect and that he did not begin viewing himself as a working-class writer until the 1960s:

Kurt Salomonson omprövade [...] synen på det egna författarskapet under påverkan av offentligheternas vågrörelser. När han själv befann sig mitt i det skeende han skildrade använde han sig av den distanserade sociologens blick och avtäckte därmed nya maktstrukturer som uppstått som en följd av folkhemmets konsensuspolitik.

Sextitalets offentlighetsförändringar nytolkade inte bara texterna, utan påverkade också författarens egen självbild och han definierade sig själv så småningom som en kämpande arbetarförfattare som samtiden (50-talet) hade missförstått.

(Kurt Salomonson [...]) reviewed his view of his own writings under influence of the changes in the public spheres. When he himself was situated in the center of the processes he was describing, he used the distancing gaze of the soci-

193 PERSONAL CONVERSATION: 2012-08-14. This ambition is also manifested in the foreword to the 1958 edition of *Grottorna*, where Salomonson claims that his purpose with the book is to criticize the combination of »bolagsdiktatur och människoförakt« (company dictatorship and contempt for humans) and the passivity of a labor movement believing that »vunna segrar skall räcka i evighet« (already won victories will last forever) (SALOMONSON: 1958, 6).

194 Salomonson's changes to *Grottorna* thus resemble the changes made by Brecht to *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder (Mother Courage and her Children)* because of its failure to convey the intended ideological message to the audience. See BRECHT: 1982, 1439.

195 See FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 307; NILSSON: 2006a, 79–80.

196 MATTSSON: 2009, 113. See also FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 305.

ologist, thereby unveiling new power structures emerging as a consequence of the consensus-oriented politics of the welfare state. [...]

The changes in the public sphere during the 1960s not only led to new interpretations of the texts, but also affected the author's self-image, and eventually he came to define himself as a struggling working-class writer who (in the 1950s) had been misunderstood by his contemporaries.¹⁹⁷

Johansson's claim that Salomonson should be viewed as a sociologically informed observer of society who was transformed into a working-class writer by political developments in the 1960s is, however, contradicted by his own analysis of the reception of *Grottorna*, which clearly demonstrates that many reviewers explicitly described it as a working-class novel already at the time of its publication.¹⁹⁸ It is also contradicted by the fact that in an article from 1959, Salomonson presents himself as an innovator of working-class literature in a way that reveals direct influence from Fridell. Salomonson argues that the generation of working-class writers who had their breakthroughs in the 1920s and 1930s are »fångna i sin egen ungdom« (trapped in their own youth), by which he means that they are out of touch with a new reality, in which poverty is no longer the central characteristic of class injustice.¹⁹⁹ »I centraliseringens samhälle är människovärdet ett lika suddigt begrepp som det var på matköernas och strejkernas tid« (In the centralized society, human dignity is as vague a concept as it was in the age of food lines and strikes), he writes, and he argues that this makes necessary a renewal of working-class literature and that – since »de fackliga förbundens representanter« (the representatives of the trade unions) are even more unable than the older working-class writers to understand contemporary class reality – »[d]en nya arbetardiktens första uppgift« (the first task for the new working-class writing) must be »att belysa missförhållanden inom det egna ledet« (to illuminate bad conditions within our own ranks).²⁰⁰ Thus, Salomonson argues, as did Fridell a decade earlier, that working-class literature needs to be adapted to a new class reality, namely, that of the welfare state.

197 JOHANSSON: 2011, 152.

198 JOHANSSON: 2013, 45–54.

199 SALOMONSON: 1959, 2

200 Ibid.

Working-Class Discontent in West-German Consumer Capitalism

In the early 1960s, there was a revival for working-class literature in West Germany, centered on the »Dortmunder Gruppe 61, Arbeitskreis für die künstlerische Auseinandersetzung mit der industriellen Arbeitswelt« (The Dortmund Group 61, Workgroup for the Artistic Dialogue with the World of Industrial Labor), which was founded on the initiative of the librarian Fritz Hüser.²⁰¹ The aim of this group was to create and promote a literature focusing on contemporary industrial labor and the social problems connected to modern industrialism.²⁰² The literature produced in and around Gruppe 61 displays both similarities to and significant differences from Swedish working-class literature from the decades after World War II. In the following, I will analyze these through a comparison, focusing on the representation of class, in, on the one hand, Fridell's and Salomonson's novels, and, on the other hand, Max von der Grün's (1926–2005) *Irrlicht und Feuer* (Will-o'-the-Wisp and Fire) from 1963. Von der Grün was the most prominent member of Gruppe 61 during its first years of existence, and his breakthrough novel *Irrlicht und Feuer*, described by the critic Stephan Reinhardt as the very first novel published in West Germany in which »der Arbeits- und Lebensalltag eines Arbeiters« (a worker's labor and everyday life) played a central role,²⁰³ is today considered to be one of the most important works within West-German working-class literature from this period.

Von der Grün has claimed that reading Fridell gave him »[d]en Impuls zu schreiben« (the impulse to become a writer),²⁰⁴ and *Irrlicht und Feuer* certainly displays similarities with Fridell's works. For example, the

201 I use, following Gerald Stieg and Berndt Witte, the term »German working-class literature« as an umbrella term for the »sozialistische Literatur« (socialist literature) from the period before 1918, the »Arbeiterdichtung« (working-class writing) and the »proletarisch-revolutionäre Literatur« (proletarian-revolutionary literature) from the Weimar Republic, as well as the various forms of »Arbeiterliteratur« (working-class literature) – including the so-called »Literatur der Arbeitswelt« (literature from the world of labor), and the »Industriedichtung« (industry writing) – from the period after World War II (STIEG and WITTE: 1973, 11).

202 See ERNST: 2011, 338.

203 REINHARDT: 2010, 335.

204 DAHINTEN: 1970, V. The work he read was probably *Död mans hand*, since this is the only book by Fridell that has been published in German (a translation by Werner Entrich was published in 1949 under the title *Eines toten Mannes Hand* by Ernst Tessloff Verlag in Hamburg).

novel's protagonist, Jürgen Fohrmann, displays a discontent with labor that very much resembles that expressed by Bohm in *Död mans hand* and *Greppet hårdnar*. When the novel begins, Fohrmann is a mineworker. When the mine where he works is closed down, he tries out a series of other jobs, and eventually he ends up in a factory making electronic components. Initially he views his career – which allegorically represents the transformation of West-German industry during the post-war period – as something positive, but later he reaches the conclusion that his situation has not really improved.²⁰⁵

Von der Grün's description of Fohrmann's discontent is (like Fridell's description of Bohm's dissatisfaction) founded in a Marxist critique of the capitalist work process.²⁰⁶ One example of this is can be found in the following complaint: »Wir bedienen hier Werkzeuge und Maschinen, aber im Grunde sind wir selbst Maschinen und Werkzeuge geworden« (Here, we use tools and machines, but on a fundamental level we have ourselves become machines and tools).²⁰⁷ Another example can be found in the following reflection by Fohrmann:

Ich bohre und bohre und schiebe die Rahmen nach rechts zu Egon Wittlich. Jeden Tag dasselbe, dieselbe Hand- und Armbewegung, dasselbe Geräusch im Saal, eintönig, Hände und Arme trennen sich vom Körper, der Kopf führt sein eigenes Leben, das mit dem Leben im Saal nichts zu tun hat. Hier ist der Mensch kein Ganzes mehr, als das er geschaffen wurde, der Mensch beginnt, sich bei dieser Arbeit zu trennen, der Kopf vom Körper, Hände und Arme vom Körper. Acht Stunden leben die einzelnen Teile getrennt, und nach Feierabend laufen sie langsam wieder zusammen, erst auf der Straße sind dann alle Teile wieder ein Ganzes.

(I drill and drill and shove the frames to the right to Egon Wittlich. Every day the same thing, the same movements of hands and arms, the same sounds in the room, monotonous, hands and arms get detached from the body, the head lives its own life, which has got nothing to do with the life in the room. Here, the human is no longer something whole, as he was created, when doing this work the human starts to become divided, the head from the body, hands and arms from the body. For eight hours the individual parts live in isolation, and after the end of the workday they slowly come together again, first in the street are all the parts once again a whole.)²⁰⁸

205 See SAFRANSKI: 1976, 93.

206 See *ibid.*, 95–99.

207 GRÜN: 2010, 278.

208 *Ibid.*, 327.

This passage brings to the fore Marx's formulation in *Capital* about how manufacture »seizes labour power by its very roots,« transforming

the labourer into a crippled monstrosity, by forcing his detail dexterity at the expense of a world of productive capabilities and instincts; just as in the States of La Plata they butcher a whole beast for the sake of his hide or his tallow. Not only is the detail work distributed to the different individuals, but the individual himself is made the automatic motor of a fractional operation, and the absurd fable of Menenius Agrippa, which makes man a mere fragment of his own body, becomes realised.²⁰⁹

Another similarity between the representations of class in *Irrlicht und Feuer* and Fridell's (and Salomonson's) novels is that they are formulated in critical dialogue with powerful cultural processes producing the belief that recent historical developments have put an end to class injustice and class antagonism. In the case of von der Grün, this dialogue is, above all, focused on ideas about the consequences for class of the establishing of *liberal democracy* after the collapse of the Third Reich and the increasing economic prosperity for workers accompanying the so called *Wirtschaftswunder* (literally, the economic wonder) that is, the rapid industrial and economic growth characterizing the West-German economy after World War II.

During the decades following World War II, both the Third Reich and Communist East Germany (GDR) functioned as the Other in relation to which the West-German *Bundesrepublik* (BRD) was constructed as a *liberal democracy*. This construction affected not only national self-understanding in West Germany in general but also the understanding of class.

This is thematized in *Irrlicht und Feuer*. One example can be found in a discussion between Fohrmann and his co-workers about the unions' unwillingness to strike for higher wages, in which a student intervenes:

Das ist doch nicht so schlimm, gemessen an der Tatsache, dass wir noch streiken dürfen und sagen können, was wir wollen. Seht euch die hinter der Elbe an. Wir haben doch unsere Freiheit.

(But that is not too bad, if one keeps in mind that we are still allowed to strike and may speak our minds. Look at those on the other side of the Elbe. After all, we still have our freedom.)²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ MARX and ENGELS: 1995, 356–366.

²¹⁰ GRÜN: 2010, 162.

What this conversation illustrates is how the distinction between the liberal and democratic BRD and the communist GDR makes it possible to push discussions about class away from the realm of economy toward the realm of politics. However, this strategy is criticized in *Irrlicht und Feuer*, for example, through the following reply to the student from his foreman:

Freiheit, du Kükén, als ob man sich dafür etwas kaufen kann. [---]

Vor den Wahlen sind wir der Staat, wenn wir uns totschießen lassen sollen, dann sind wir Staat, wenn wir die Karre aus dem Dreck ziehen müssen, dann sind wir Staat. [---] Und der Kumpel unter Tage hat nicht mal drei Mark Stundenlohn, und der ist auch der Staat, und alle in diesem Staat haben eine fortschrittliche Freiheit, und deshalb sind wir glücklich, weil wir die Presse aufreißen dürfen und weil wir streiken dürfen ... du dämlicher Kerl.

(Freedom, you oik, do you think you can buy anything with that? [---])

Before the elections we are the state, when we are supposed to let ourselves be shot dead, then we are the state, when we are needed to get things done, then we are the state. [---] And the worker down in the mine doesn't even make three Marks per hour, and he too is the state, and everyone in this state has a progressive freedom, and therefore we are happy, since we are allowed to open our mouths and since we are allowed to strike ... you stupid man.)²¹¹

The idea that political democracy has put an end to class injustice is thus criticized in *Irrlicht und Feuer*, along with the belief that the introduction of industrial democracy has defused class antagonism, as evidenced by the following discussion between Fohrmann and one of his co-workers:

In Bonn allein kann nicht Demokratie gemacht werden, wenn die Demokratie nicht in die Betriebe getragen wird. Verstehst du?

Aber die haben wir doch im Betrieb, wir haben einen Betriebsrat, eine Opposition sozusagen, sagte ich.

Meine Güte, rief er, die Opposition in den Betrieben wird doch vom Unternehmer bezahlt.

(We cannot have democracy in Bonn, if democracy is not spread to the companies. Do you understand?)

But we already have it in the company. We have a Betriebsrat²¹², an opposition, so to speak, I said.

My goodness, he shouted, haven't you noticed that the opposition in the companies is paid for by the employers.)²¹³

²¹¹ Ibid., 163.

²¹² The *Betriebsrat* is a legally institutionalized committee for workers' participation in decision-making within private companies.

²¹³ GRÜN: 2010, 276.

Here, Fohrmann's co-worker undermines the idea of democracy as a remedy for class injustice in two ways. First, he points out that the hegemonic commitment to democracy in West Germany is, first and foremost, a commitment to *political* democracy, and that democracy still has to penetrate the site in which class is constituted, namely, the site of production. Second, he highlights that the existing forms for industrial democracy do not even live up to the basic standards of political democracy, since the »opposition« is not autonomous from its counterpart.

However, the most powerful cultural process conditioning the representation of class in *Irrlicht und Feuer* is the one producing the belief that the increased standard of living enjoyed by German workers because of the so called economic wonder has put an end to class injustice.

Von der Grün uses the concept of »Wunder« (wonder) to signify the emergence of a new reality, as in the following description of the city of Dortmund:

Mein Gott, was wird in Dortmund nicht alles gebaut, sogar ein Stadttheater, und was wurde nicht schon alles gebaut, neue Industrien, Tausende von Wohnungen, breite und sichere Straßen – ja, Dortmund ist eine rührige Stadt. An die Schäden des Krieges erinnert fast nichts mehr, das kann man wirklich ein Wunder nennen.

(My God, what is not being built in Dortmund, even a theater, and what has not already been built, new industries, thousands of homes, broad and safe streets – yes, Dortmund is a vibrant city. Almost nothing reminds you of the war damages, that is truly something one could call a wonder.)²¹⁴

Fohrmann recognizes that in this new reality workers enjoy a relatively high standard of living, but he also claims that this is not an entirely positive thing, as when arguing that the »Wirtschaftswunder bringt uns alles, Wohlstand und Raten, Eigenheim und Schulden, Arbeitsplatz und Kündigungsbedrohung« (economic wonder brings us everything, prosperity and installments, our own homes and debts, jobs and threats of dismissal).²¹⁵ Above all, however, von der Grün's novel challenges the idea that the increased standard of living for workers has led to the disappearance of the working class. One example of this can be found in the following description of a conversation between Fohrmann and his friend Karl Borowski:

²¹⁴ Ibid., 23.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 56.

Als ich ihm voriges Jahr einmal sagte, dass es kein Proletariat mehr gibt, dass der Arbeiter sich beleidigt fühlt, wenn er so genannt wird, denn jeder Arbeiter habe heute eine gute Wohnung und fahre bald ein Auto, sah er mich verwirrt an. Gibt es denn keine Armen mehr?, fragte er mich. Ja, sagte ich, die gibt es auch noch, aber das darf man nicht so laut sagen, denn Gewerkschaft und Unternehmer hören das nicht gern.

(When I told him last year that the proletariat no longer exists, that the worker gets offended when he is called that, since every worker now has a good place to live and soon will be driving a car, he gave me a perplexed look. Are there no poor people anymore? he asked. Yes, I said, they are still around, but you are not allowed to say that out loud, because it is not something the unions or the companies like to hear.)²¹⁶

In addition to arguing that class injustices continue to exist despite the German economic wonder, Fohrmann also claims that this wonder (because it is a product of capitalism) will intensify these injustices. This idea is put forward in a stream of thoughts provoked by the fact that he and his colleagues are testing a mining machine intended for export to South Africa:

Nach Südafrika? Ja, verurteilt die Rassenpolitik, aber um Gottes willen, haltet den Handel hoch, der Handel ist unser Wunder, und ohne Wunder können wir in unserer Zeit nicht mehr existieren.

Aber wir Arbeiter zahlen dafür, wir zahlen den Preis in Blut. Was soll es, die Zeit der Blutzölle hat nie aufgehört, sie ging 1945 nicht zu Ende. Wir sind die Kaninchen in den [...] Labors der Exportwirtschaft.

(To South Africa? Yes, condemn the racial policy but, for God's sake, honor trade, trade is our wonder, and without wonder we cannot exist anymore in our era.

But we workers pay for this, we pay the price in blood. What's the point? The age of blood tolls has never ended, it did not come to an end in 1945. We are the rabbits in the export economy's [...] laboratories.)²¹⁷

Fohrmann also expresses a similar idea during a drunken rant at a meeting at his workplace:

Und deshalb, Kameraden, weil wir materielle Sicherheit wollen, stecken wir alles ein. Wir würden uns sogar verprügeln lassen, wenn uns am Monatsletzen eine bestimmte Summe garantiert würde, die uns dann ein Leben in Wohlstand sichert. Wir halten unsere Schnauze, auch wenn Vorgesetzte uns Arschlöcher und Idioten titulieren [...]. Wir schreien uns an, zum Gaudium anderer, die mit unserer Arbeitskraft und Gesundheit Dividende scheffeln. [---] Wir verkaufen unser Menschsein heute für Geld, und wir glauben sogar daran, wenn gesagt

²¹⁶ Ibid., 66.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 142.

wird: Der Arbeiter ist der Demokratie liebstes Kind. Aber, Kameraden, doch nur vor den Wahlen.

(And therefore, comrades, because we want material security, we put up with anything. We would even accept to be flogged if that guaranteed us a large enough sum of money at the end of the month to live in prosperity. We shut up, even when our superiors call us assholes and idiots [...]. We shout at each other, for the benefit of others, who make profits from our labor power and our health. [---] Today we sell our humanity for money, and we even believe what is said: The worker is democracy's favorite child. But, comrades, only before the elections.)²¹⁸

Fohrmann's dissatisfaction with his life as a worker during the era of West-German economic wonder is thus, ultimately, a discontent with capitalism. Nevertheless, the main theme in *Irrlicht and Feuer* is not a critique of capitalist class relations, but of how these are made invisible. Despite Fohrmann's criticism of capitalism, he and the other workers in the novel are, above all, described as being unable to develop a proletarian class consciousness. Here, *Irrlicht und Feuer* resembles Salomonson's *Grottorna*, but while Salomonson describes the absence of proletarian class consciousness as an inability among workers to understand radical class discourse, von der Grün instead thematizes how such discourses have become detached from contemporary class reality and class struggle.

The workers in *Irrlicht and Feuer* confront their employers several times, both in discussions and through strikes. During these confrontations, there is no shortage of class-struggle rhetoric. But this rhetoric is not connected to any deeper understanding of class antagonism, or to any form of meaningful class politics. Instead, its main function seems to be to function as a safety valve, legitimizing occasional carnivalesque breaks with everyday life.

At the workplace meeting at which Fohrmann formulates his discontent, there is certainly no shortage of radical class discourse. When one worker complains about a new tool that does not function properly and gets the reply that the workers need to be more careful when handling the equipment, chaos breaks out:

Achtsamer umgehen. Vom Schreibtisch sieht alles anders aus, das ist einfach dummes Gerede ...

Ich verbitte mir Ihre Beleidigungen ...

Das sind keine Beleidigungen, das sind nackte Wahrheiten.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 97–98.

Allgemeines Gelächter im Saal, dann überschrie jeder jeden, auf die Tische wurde geschlagen, mit den Füßen gestampft. Streiken!, riefen einige, andere riefen: Ihr Idioten! Nieder mit den Kerlen, gellte es aus irgendeinem Winkel, und im Thekenraum lief nun doch eine Schallplatte ab, entweder war es Zufall, oder es hatte sich einer einen bösen Scherz erlaubt. Jedenfalls grölte der Schallplattensänger: Du bist verrückt mein Kind ... Immer wieder versuchten einige Betriebsräte, sich Gehör zu verschaffen, aber das Toben nahm kein Ende.

(More careful handling. From a desk everything looks different, that is just stupid talk ...

I refuse to be insulted ...

That is no insult, it is the naked truth.

General laughing in the room, then everyone started yelling, hammering on the tables, stomping with their feet. Strike! some shouted, others shouted: You idiots! Down with them, it came from one corner, and in the bar a record started playing, either by accident, or as a joke. Anyhow, the singer on the record brawled: You are mad, my child ... Over and over again, some of the elected worker representatives tried to make themselves heard, but the noise did not end.)²¹⁹

That this violent reaction has little to do with the real issues under discussion is underlined through the comment that the wildest behavior was displayed by those who did not use the malfunctioning equipment, whereas those who were directly concerned »saßen still auf ihren Stühlen und tranken Bier« (sat quietly on their chairs and drank beer).²²⁰

This reduction of radical class discourse and working-class militancy to a carnivalesque spectacle is also highlighted in the description in *Irrlicht und Feuer* of a demonstration against the closing of a mine. When the workers suddenly, and for no apparent reason, overturn a police car, the demonstration is transformed from a political event into »ein Heiden Spaß« (brouhaha).²²¹ The workers start throwing stones at the police »aus Spaß« (for fun) and screaming »aus Lust am Geschrei« (for the fun of screaming).²²² This development scares Fohrmann:

[I]ch hatte plötzlich Angst vor der Courage der Menge, zu der ich doch selbst gehörte, Angst vor dieser sinnlosen Courage, denn niemand hier konnte sagen, was planvoll zu geschehen hatte. Wir waren alle einem Leithammel gefolgt, blind, ohne Überlegung, und niemand wusste, wer dieser Leithammel war. Nun standen wir da wie blökende Schafe [...].

²¹⁹ Ibid., 92.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., 113.

²²² Ibid.

(I suddenly got scared of the courage of the mass to which I belonged, scared of this meaningless courage, for no one of us had any idea about a meaningful course of action. We had all blindly, without conviction, followed a leader and no one knew who this leader was. Now we stood there like baaing sheep [...].)²²³

When the police disperse the demonstration, Fohrmann makes the following remark:

Wir waren nicht geschlagen worden, wir hatten auch gar nicht gekämpft [...] Wir wollten unsere Kraft erproben und sind davongelaufen, noch ehe es zur Probe kam. Wir hatten keine Vorstellung über unser Tun. Wir waren erbärmlich, und die großen Worte unterstrichen nur unsere Erbärmlichkeit.

(We had not been beaten, we had not even fought [...]. We wanted to test our strength and we ran away before it was tested. We had no idea about our actions. We were pitiful, and the big words only accentuated our pitifulness.)²²⁴

The radical class discourse – the »big words« – mobilized by workers in *Irrlicht und Feuer* is thus described as a simulacrum of class consciousness.

Tradition and Literary Class Struggle

The representation of class in *Irrlicht und Feuer* displays several similarities with that in Fridell's and Salomonson's novels. This is, to a high degree, a product of resemblances between the conditions overdetermining these authors' interventions in cultural class struggle. Whereas it was necessary for Fridell and Salomonson to confront the idea that the emergence of the Swedish welfare state had put an end to class conflict, von der Grün had to challenge the idea that democratization and »the economic wonder« had transformed West Germany into a society free from class antagonism. There are, however, also differences. One of these is that while Fridell and Salomonson self-reflexively thematize the relationship between their representations of class and hegemonic ideals in the site of literature and call for a renewal of the tradition of working-class literature, von der Grün's novel contains almost no references to questions about *literature in general* or *working-class literature in particular*. This does not, however, mean that von der Grün's intervention in cultural class struggle is not mediated through the site of literature. On the contrary, the lack of references to literature in *Irrlicht und Feuer* is

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid., 117.

an expression of a strategic withdrawal from literary debates conditioned by the *relative weakness of the tradition of working-class literature in the site of West-German literature*.

Fridell's and Salomonson's calls for the renewal of working-class literature are emblematic of an ambivalent attitude towards the tradition displayed by many Swedish working-class writers,²²⁵ an ambivalence that is conditioned by the overdetermination of Swedish working-class literature by changing class realities and by the conditions in the site of literature, in which working-class writers' interventions in cultural class struggle are articulated.

The high status attributed to the tradition of working-class literature in Swedish literature has given legitimacy to this literature's interventions in cultural class struggle.²²⁶ At the same time, however, changes in the class realities overdetermining these interventions have had as a result that the aesthetical-political strategies developed within the tradition of working-class literature have repeatedly become dated.²²⁷ Thus, at the same time as Swedish working-class writers have tried to gain literary legitimacy by claiming membership in the tradition of working-class literature, changes in the class reality have also compelled them to distance themselves from it.

The status for West-German working-class literature has never been especially high in the site of national literature. Von der Grün has claimed, for example, that the revival for working-class literature in West Germany in the early 1960s took place in a »Vakuum« (vacuum).²²⁸ Even though this may be an exaggeration, it is certainly true that working-class literature was a marginalized phenomenon in West Germany during the immediate post-war period.²²⁹ As has been pointed out by Gertraud Linz, for example, in the early 1960s there were only three prominent West-German writers who had a working-class background,²³⁰ and as has been demonstrated by Ralf Schnell, before the emergence of Gruppe 61 in 1961,

225 See NILSSON 2004, 185; NILSSON 2012, 49.

226 See *ibid.*, 53.

227 See *ibid.*, 52.

228 SAFRANSKI: 1976, 10.

229 See *ibid.*, 10–11.

230 LINZ: 1965.

only a few literary works about the world of labor had been published in West Germany.²³¹

One important reason for this marginalization of working-class literature in West Germany was that it was difficult to construct this literature as a tradition. This has been highlighted by Ilsabe Dagmar Arnold-Dielewicz and Heinz Ludwig Arnold, who, when discussing the weakness in the 1950s of West German working-class literature, argue that during this period no »Zusammenhang« (connection) and no »institutionalisierte Solidarität« (institutionalized solidarity) existed between writing workers.²³² They also point out that most working-class writers had a very limited knowledge about literary history and that they could thus not connect to older working-class writing.²³³

According to Bernd Witte, this inability to construct a tradition is a general tendency within German working-class literature. He argues that German working-class writers have never understood their works as a unified body of literature and that they have generally been ignorant regarding their predecessors.²³⁴ This has had several reasons. One is the fact that German working-class literature has always been a highly heterogeneous and conflict-ridden phenomenon. For example, the working-class literature of the Weimar Republic was divided into two antagonistic strands – the social-democratic working-class literature and the communist proletarian-revolutionary literature respectively²³⁵ – which made it difficult to view it as one tradition. In addition to this, the fact that the self-understanding of the two strands was closely tied to contemporary political battles resulted in none of them demonstrating an interest in connecting to older working-class literature.²³⁶ Another reason is that what could have developed into a tradition of working-class literature has often been interrupted. The working-class literature emerging in the nineteenth century, for example, was to a large extent destroyed when Bismarck's »Anti-Socialist Laws« of 1878 dealt severe blows to the cultural institutions serving as its infrastructure.²³⁷ Later, both the main strands in

²³¹ SCHNELL: 1993, 360–361.

²³² ARNOLD-DIELEWICZ and ARNOLD: 1975, 10.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ STIEG and WITTE 1973, 7.

²³⁵ See ARNOLD-DIELEWICZ and ARNOLD: 1975, 8.

²³⁶ See STIEG and WITTE: 1973, 8.

²³⁷ See ARNOLD-DIELEWICZ and ARNOLD: 1975, 8.

the working-class literature from the Weimar Republic were interrupted by the Nazi power seizure in 1933; the proletarian-revolutionary literature was destroyed together with the communist movement,²³⁸ and the social-democratic working-class literature was, at least to some extent, incorporated into the »völkische« (vernacular/popular) literature promoted by the Nazis.²³⁹ After World War II, a resurgence of the proletarian-revolutionary literature was hindered in West Germany by the weakness of the communist movement. In addition to this, the cultural politics of the West-German Communist Party (KPD) mainly limited itself to »die Pflege der durch den Faschismus verzerrten bürgerlich-humanistischen Tradition« (caring for the bourgeois-humanistic tradition that had been distorted by Fascism), and, thus, did not aim at promoting working-class literature.²⁴⁰ Thus the cultural infrastructure provided for the proletarian-revolutionary literature by the communist party during the Weimar republic did not exist in post-war West Germany.²⁴¹ The social-democratic working-class literature also had a relatively marginal position in post-war West Germany. One important reason for this was that its incorporation into the Nazi literature during the 1930s and 1940s made it appear ideologically problematic.²⁴² (The same was, of course true for the proletarian-revolutionary literature, because of its close ties to communism.) The effects of these interruptions of the tradition of working-class literature have been highlighted by Carol Poore, who argues that in the 1960s, the memory of »both earlier proletarian culture originating from the ›base‹ as well as earlier efforts by oppositional writers and journalists to ally themselves with workers in ways aiming toward social change« had vanished and that the »extinguishing of these traditions« meant that those who set out to write about the world of labor »had to

²³⁸ See *ibid.*, 9.

²³⁹ STIEG and WITTE: 1973, 127–137.

²⁴⁰ SAFRANSKI: 1976, 26. The KPD was banned in 1956, and when a new communist party (DKP) was founded in 1968, this politics was maintained (see *ibid.*, 197).

²⁴¹ The relative weakness of American working-class literature after World War II probably has similar reasons. As has been underlined by among others Barbara Foley and Nathaniel Mills, the American proletarian literature from the 1930s was organized around the cultural institutions of the Communist Party. The demise of communism in America after World War II, then, led to the demise also of proletarian literature, and to the inability for post-communist working-class writers to establish themselves as members of a tradition of working-class literature (FOLEY: 1993; MILLS: 2007).

²⁴² See SAFRANSKI: 1976, 10; STIEG and WITTE: 1973, 138.

rediscover for themselves some of the methods that their predecessors had used and change these to suit their own situations« or »strike out from new positions altogether.«²⁴³

In the official founding document of Gruppe 61, it is stated that one of its central aims was to engage critically with earlier working-class literature.²⁴⁴ However, this turned out to be a rather problematic enterprise, and the attitude toward older working-class literature within Gruppe 61 was, throughout the group's existence, marked more by distance than proximity.

This can be illustrated with the argument put forward by one of the members of Gruppe 61, Josef Reding, that the generation of working-class writers emerging after 1945 did not want to be viewed as »Epigonen« (epigones) of the working-class literature from the Weimar Republic.²⁴⁵ This felt need to break with older working-class literature can be connected to the idea about the emergence in post-war West Germany of a new class reality that was radically different from the one in which older working-class literatures had developed, an idea that is explicitly expressed by Hüser in his preface to an almanac published by Gruppe 61. »Im Zeitalter der Mitbestimmung und der Automation« (In the age of codetermination and automation), Hüser writes, »stehen andere Fragen und Probleme im Vordergrund als die der früheren Arbeiterdichtung« (other questions and problems are central than those thematized in the earlier working-class literature).²⁴⁶ Writers who want to discuss these new problems must, according to Hüser, develop »neue Formen« (new forms) for which neither »die Arbeiterdichtung der zwanziger und dreißiger Jahre« (the working-class literature from the 1920s and 1930s), nor the working-class literature developed in the GDR can serve as a model.²⁴⁷

Another good example of the rather negative attitude within the Gruppe 61 towards older working-class literature is found in an interview with von der Grün, in which he repeatedly downplays the importance of earlier working-class writers for his own writing. Among other things, he argues that although he does not have anything against being labeled a

²⁴³ POORE: 2000, 217.

²⁴⁴ See DITHMAR: 1973, 169,

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 48.

²⁴⁶ DORTMUNDER GRUPPE 61: 1966, 24–25.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 25

working-class writer, he was, for a long time, totally ignorant about older working-class literature.²⁴⁸ He also argues that the Nazi regime managed to interrupt the tradition of working-class literature, and that after the war, this literature was totally out of touch with contemporary reality.²⁴⁹

Thus, the word »kritische« (critical) is, as Reinhard Dithmar has pointed out, central to the understanding of the dialogue with older working-class literature proclaimed in the statutes of the Gruppe 61.²⁵⁰ Rather than trying to modernize older forms of working-class literature, the members of the group distanced themselves from them and instead laid the ground for a new form of literature, namely, that of »Industriedichtung« (industry writing).²⁵¹ Eventually, the aim to engage in dialogue with older working-class literature was removed from the statutes.²⁵²

The critique against older working-class literature formulated within the Gruppe 61 resembles that put forward by Fridell and Salomonson; because of the emergence of new class realities, its strategies for intervention in cultural class struggle have become dated. The conclusions drawn from this analysis are, however, radically different. Whereas the Swedish working-class writers called for a renewal of the tradition, the West-German writers disassociated from their predecessors. This difference is a product of differences between the conceptualization and status of working-class literature in the sites of literature during the decades after World War II in Sweden and West Germany respectively.

In Sweden, working-class literature was conceptualized as a strong tradition and consecrated in the site of literature as an important strand in modern Swedish literature (mainly because the working-class writers of the 1930s continued to occupy dominant positions in the national site of literature). This made it possible and desirable for working-class writers to claim membership in the tradition. Above all, such membership helped legitimize their radical representation of class both inside and outside of the site of literature. In West Germany, on the other hand, working-class literature was not viewed as an important literary tradition, but as a conglomerate of disparate strands of literature, which for various

248 GRÜN: 2010, 396–397.

249 Ibid., 423.

250 DITHMAR: 1973, 54

251 See *ibid.*; SAFRANSKI: 1976, 15 AND 126–131.

252 See DITHMAR: 1973, 66.

reasons enjoyed relatively low status in the site of literature. Therefore, von der Grün and other working-class writers distanced themselves from their predecessors.

These differences between the conceptualization and status of working-class literature in West Germany and Sweden respectively may be part of the explanation for the fact that whereas Fridell (and, to a lesser extent, Salomonson) self-reflexively thematizes the relationship between his representations of class and hegemonic *literary* ideals, von der Grün only engages in explicit dialogue with cultural processes outside the site of literature.

Self-reflexively drawing attention to one's own position in the site of literature is a salient feature of Swedish working-class literature.²⁵³ What Fridell thematizes is how his radical discourse about class is subaltern in relation to dominant ideals in the site of literature. This is certainly true also for von der Grün's representation of class. To explicitly thematize such subalternity, however, only makes sense as part of challenging the hegemonic ideals (otherwise it would constitute nothing more than literary masochism). Therefore, one of the important differences between Fridell and von der Grün is that the former's membership in a tradition of working-class literature enjoying a relatively high status in the site of literature makes possible such a challenge.

²⁵³ See ADOLFSSON: 1995, 8; NILSSON: 2006a, 152–156.

Chapter 3

Class Struggle and Form: Working-Class Literature in the Era of the New Left

The revival of Swedish working-class literature in the late 1960s and the 1970s was, above all, made possible by the general radicalization of Swedish politics and culture accompanying the rise of the New Left.²⁵⁴ This radicalization – which has been described as a sudden and collective discovery of such phenomena as capitalism, class society, and alienation²⁵⁵ – helped in putting questions about class in general and questions about the working-class in particular on the agenda, both in the public sphere and in the site of literature, thus generating increased interest in working-class literature.

This can be seen in the changed reception of Fridell's novels from the 1940s. Earlier, their critique of Swedish class society had often been dismissed with the point of departure in the hegemonic understanding of the Swedish welfare state as a society free from class antagonism, but after the rise of the New Left more and more commentators considered it to be both relevant and legitimate.²⁵⁶ One important reason for this was the New Left's promotion of Marxist theory, including Marx's theories about alienation.²⁵⁷ It was in the light of these that Fridell's critique of industrial labor gained relevance and earned him the status of a »föregångare« (forerunner) for the New Left's critique of the capitalist work process.²⁵⁸ Fridell himself even went as far as arguing that twenty-five years after the publication of *Död mans hand*, »nästan varenda människa« (almost everyone) supported his demands for »industriell demokrati« (industrial democracy) and that the political parties now »överbjuder varandra i radikalism på det området« (outbid each other in radicalism in this area).²⁵⁹ This claim is clearly exaggerated, or even ironic. Nevertheless, the general radicalization of the political climate, to which the rise of the New Left contributed, did lead to a more favorable reception of the socialist class poli-

254 See *ibid.*, 81.

255 LUNDQVIST: 1981, 41.

256 See BLOM: 1978, 162.

257 See LAGERLÖF: 1975, 14–15.

258 MATTSSON: 2009, 115.

259 FRIDELL: 1970, 124.

tics promoted in Fridell's novels, as well as in other working-class literature.

The rise of the New Left did not only affect the general ideological climate in Sweden but also had substantial impact on the ideals in the site of literature.²⁶⁰ For example, Furuland claims that during this period left-wing engagement in general, and Marxism in particular, rapidly gained strength within Swedish literary criticism.²⁶¹ The following description of Salomonson's literary career illustrates some of the consequences of this development for working-class literature:

Den nya vänsterns framväxt under senare delen av 60-talet och offentligheternas förändring som en följd gav Kurt Salomonson en ny position på det litterära fältet. [---]

Den nya författaren i denna nya tid var politisk med en politisk dagordning. Den författartypen var tämligen marginaliserad under decenniet innan.

(The emergence of the New Left during the latter part of the 60s and the changes in the public sphere brought about by it gave Salomonson a new position in the field of literature. [---])

The new writer in this new time was political and had a political agenda. That type of writer had been rather marginalized during the previous decade.)²⁶²

Both older and younger working-class writers matched the profile of this »new writer,« and thus the changes in the site of literature brought about by the rise of the New Left helped make possible both a strengthening of the status for the tradition of working-class literature and the emergence of a new generation of working-class writers.

Searching for Working-Class Forms

To a large extent, the New Left's influence in the site of literature was a product of successful cultural struggles waged from new literary institutions, such as left-wing publishing houses, periodicals, and bookstores, which, taken together, constituted a set of relatively autonomous sub-sites to the national site of literature.²⁶³ One of the most important of these sub-sites was the one centered on the biweekly magazine *Folket i Bild/Kulturfront* (The People in Picture/Culture Front), usually referred to by its acronym FiB/K.

²⁶⁰ See LAGERLÖF: 1975, 10.

²⁶¹ FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 329.

²⁶² JOHANSSON: 2011, 150–151.

²⁶³ See NILSSON: 2006a, 84.

FiB/K was published by a ›united-front organization‹ bearing the same name as the magazine, which was formed around three political principles: defense of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, anti-imperialism, and promotion of »folkets kultur« (the people's culture). The last of these principles constituted the foundation for the organization's literary politics,²⁶⁴ which consisted mainly in the publication of literature and literary criticism (both in the magazine and through the organization's publishing house Kulturfront) and aimed, above all, at promoting Swedish working-class literature.

Very often FiB/K used Ivar Lo-Johansson as a symbol for, or even an embodiment of, »the people's culture.« In the organization's program, for example, it is argued that its promotion of »folkets kultur« (the people's culture) is based on »den djupa övertygelsen« (the deep conviction) that the people »egentligen föredrar Ivar Lo-Johansson framför utvinkningsflickor« (really prefer Ivar Lo-Johansson over pin-up girls),²⁶⁵ and in the very first issue of the magazine, the publication of a short story by Lo-Johansson was advertised in big print on the cover.²⁶⁶ Lo-Johansson was also represented in two anthologies published by FiB/K: *Våra författare: Sexton radikala berättare ur en svensk folklig tradition* (Our Writers: Sixteen Radical Writers from a Swedish Popular Tradition), from 1974, and *Konsten att skriva en novell och andra noveller ur Folket i Bild Kulturfront* (The Art of Writing a Short Story and Other Short Stories from Folket i Bild Kulturfront), from 1977.

Even if Lo-Johansson had a special status in FiB/K's discourse on literature, the organization did also promote other working-class writers, and indeed the tradition of Swedish working-class literature in general. In *Våra författare*, for example, all but two of the 16 represented writers belonged to this tradition,²⁶⁷ and a majority of the contributions to *Konsten*

264 See FOLKET I BILD/KULTURFRONT: 1977a, 8.

265 FOLKET I BILD/KULTURFRONT: 1977b, 23.

266 See *ibid.*, 21.

267 The writers represented in *Våra författare* are: Gunnar Adolfsson, Dan Andersson, Allan Eriksson, Jan Fridegård, Folke Fridell, Gustav Hedevind-Eriksson, Olof Högberg, Josef Kjellgren, Ivar Lo-Johansson, Moa Martinson, Vilhelm Moberg, Maria Sandel, August Strindberg, Birger Vikström, Rudolf Värnlund, and Karl Östman. Except for Strindberg and Högberg, all of these are described as working-class writers in Furuland's history of Swedish working-class literature (see FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006).

att skriva en novell were also written by working-class writers.²⁶⁸ Other examples include the facts that at a literature conference arranged by FiB/K, Lars Furuland gave a lecture on the history of Swedish working-class literature;²⁶⁹ that a local branch of FiB/K produced a travelling exhibition about the tradition of working-class literature, which was exhibited at public libraries;²⁷⁰ and that the members of another local branch edited a collection of short stories by the working-class writer Karl Östman, which gained wide circulation.²⁷¹

However, the New Left not only promoted the tradition of working-class literature but also contributed to the formulation of a critique of this tradition, focusing on its alleged inability to break free from *bourgeois literary forms*.

One aspect of this critique was formulated within the academic Marxist literary criticism, which emerged at Swedish universities during this period and soon gained a very strong position also in non-academic literary discussions.²⁷² One of the most important arguments put forward by the Marxist critics was that »litterära former, genrer och system« (literary forms, genres and systems) existing in a capitalist society »ytterst bestäms av och uttrycker kapitalistiska förhållanden« (in the last instance are determined by and expressing capitalist conditions).²⁷³ This theory was applied in the analysis of Swedish working-class literature by, among others, Arne Melberg, who claimed that the breakthrough for working-class writers in the site of literature early in the twentieth century meant that a working-class literature, which »länge levt som ›sub-kultur« (for a long time had existed as a »sub-culture«), »absorberas av de borgerliga institutionerna« (is absorbed by bourgeois institutions)²⁷⁴ and integrated into

²⁶⁸ *Konsten att skriva en novell* contains short stories by 31 authors, of which some are amateurs. Almost all of the more established authors – Ove Allansson, Folke Fridell, Jan Fogelbäck, Ivar Lo-Johansson, Sture Källberg, Ann-Charlotte Alverfors, Gunnar Adolfs-son, Bunny Ragnerstam, Sven O. Bergkvist, Nils Parling, and Aino Trosell – are generally considered to be working-class writers and are discussed as such by Furuland in his history of Swedish working-class literature (see *ibid.*).

²⁶⁹ See FURULAND: 1977, 4–20.

²⁷⁰ See FOLKET I BILD/KULTURFRONT: 1977c, II.

²⁷¹ See HOLM: 1977, 4.

²⁷² See LUNDQVIST: 1981, 53.

²⁷³ MELBERG: 1975, II.

²⁷⁴ MELBERG: 1973, 85.

»borgerliga produktionsformer« (bourgeois forms of production).²⁷⁵ Melberg focused mainly on working-class writers' alleged inability to break free from the tradition of »den borgerliga realismen« (*bourgeois realism*),²⁷⁶ which he viewed as an »uttryck« (expression) of specific »tendenser i det borgerliga samhället« (tendencies in the bourgeois society) and as being intimately connected with »borgarklassens utveckling till politisk och ekonomisk makt« (the bourgeoisie's rise to political and economic power).²⁷⁷ A similar argument was also put forward by Birgitta Holm, who argued that the confrontation between working-class literature and the bourgeois institution of literature in the 1920s and the 1930s had as a result that practically all of the working-class writers »dukade under« (succumbed) and that »den proletära erfarenheten« (the proletarian experience) became subordinate to a »borgerlig självförståelse« (bourgeois self-understanding).²⁷⁸

The academic Marxist critique of Swedish working-class writers' alleged inability to break with bourgeois literary forms was soon picked up within the Swedish New Left's cultural and political organizations. In a study material for FiB/K's members, for example, it is argued that shortly after their breakthrough in the 1930s, many working-class writers were integrated into the bourgeoisie,²⁷⁹ and in his lecture at FiB/K's literature conference, Furuland claimed that the archetypical genre in Swedish working-class literature from the 1930s – the proletarian *Bildungsroman* – because of formal influence from Strindberg's *Tjänstekvinnans son* (published in English as *The Son of a Servant*), reproduced bourgeois individualism.²⁸⁰

More prominent within FiB/K, however, was a critique of the realist aesthetics usually associated with the tradition of Swedish working-class literature emanating from the so-called Brecht-Lukács literary debate (also known as the »realism debate« or the »expressionism debate«), which commenced in the 1930s and has continued thereafter as »a broad discussion of disagreements among Marxist artists and theorists about the values and characteristics of classical, bourgeois and socialist art.«²⁸¹

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 101.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 23. Emphasis in the original.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 25.

²⁷⁸ HOLM: 1975, 247.

²⁷⁹ FOLKET I BILD/KULTURFRONT: 1977b, 65.

²⁸⁰ FURULAND: 1977, 8.

²⁸¹ KIRALYFAVI: 1990, 19.

Lukács' point of departure in this debate was, in Eugene Lunn's words, a carefully delineated polemical theory of modern European literature based largely upon a distinction between classical realism and naturalism. Alluding particularly to Balzac and Tolstoi, he defined realism as a literary mode in which the lives of individual characters were portrayed as part of a narrative which situated them within the entire historical dynamics of their society.²⁸²

Naturalism, on the other hand, he viewed as »the prototype of all modernist writing, in which reality is perceived merely in its factual immediacy,« divorced from »the historically changing social totality,« and uncritically reflecting »the immediate experience of chaos, alienation and dehumanization in advanced capitalist society.«²⁸³ Therefore, Lukács »prescribed« for socialist writers »a continuation of the older traditions of ›bourgeois realism,‹ with an added socialist perspective.«²⁸⁴

Brecht criticized Lukács for formalism and for fetishizing bourgeois nineteenth century realism as realism as such, and instead advocated formal experimentation (including the use of those *avant-garde forms* criticized by Lukács) as a means for representing reality realistically.²⁸⁵ Formal means such as »montage, Joycean inner monologue,« or »Kafkaesque distancing,« Brecht argued, were not »inevitably tied to their current social or ideological uses,«²⁸⁶ and the techniques developed by modernist writers, could thus very well be instrumentalized for socialist purposes.²⁸⁷

Several of Brecht's contributions to the debate with Lukács were not published until the 1960s,²⁸⁸ when they received considerable attention within the New Left. One example of this is the publication in the *New Left Review* of Brecht's article »Against Georg Lukács« as well as an introduction to the entire debate.²⁸⁹ Another example is the publication in 1977 by New Left Books of an anthology containing both Brecht's »Against Georg Lukács« and Lukács' »Realism in the Balance.«²⁹⁰ In Sweden, an anthology containing translations of a large number of texts

282 LUNN: 1974, 13.

283 Ibid.

284 LUNN: 1974, 14.

285 See EAGLETON: 2002, 65–67.

286 LUNN: 1974, 31.

287 See *ibid.*, 15.

288 See *ibid.*, 12.

289 BRECHT: 1974

290 BLOCH et al.: 1977.

on realism by Lukács and Brecht was published in 1975.²⁹¹ Some of these texts, as well as articles on the Brecht-Lukács literary debate, were also printed in various left-wing publications.²⁹²

That Brecht's critique of Lukács played an important role in the literary discussions within FiB/K is indicated by the several references to it in various texts published by the organization. In FiB/K's study material, for example, it is argued that Joyce's *Ulysses* represents »tekniska landvinningar som ingen folklig berättare kan undgå att ta ställning till och kanske använda för att bättre skildra verkligheten« (technical achievements that no popular writer can avoid taking a stand on, and perhaps use in order to better represent reality),²⁹³ and the Swedish translation of the Brecht-Lukács debate is recommended for study.²⁹⁴ More examples can be found in the addresses at FiB/K's conference on literature. The historian of ideas, Sven-Eric Liedman, for example, argued that »nästan allt det som vi tveklöst kallar realistiskt« (almost everything that we unhesitatingly call realistic) is in fact bourgeois realism and that Brecht is one of few writers who have managed to »bryta igenom den borgerliga realismens ramar« (break through the confines of bourgeois realism).²⁹⁵ Brecht was also included in an anthology containing examples of non-Swedish progressive literature, *Våra författare 2* (Our Writers 2), which was published by FiB/K in 1975.

Within FiB/K, then, formal eclecticism and openness towards modernist experimentation à la Brecht was proposed as an alternative to the realism generally associated with the tradition of Swedish working-class literature. However, within other parts of the New Left, yet other alternatives were promoted. Above all, *documentarism* was put forward as a means for breaking what was conceived of as the bourgeoisie's stranglehold on literature. A good example of this can be found in an essay entitled »Litteraturkritik i borgarklassens tjänst« (Literary Criticism in the Service of the Bourgeoisie), in which a group of young Marxist academics argued that it was easy for critics to »avväpna« (disarm) Salomonson's critique of capitalism in *Grottorna* because he had had used »den »kon-

291 BJURMAN: 1975.

292 See BRECHT: 1977; HAAVARDSHOLM: 1977.

293 FOLKET I BILD/KULTURFRONT: 1977b, 69.

294 Ibid., 143.

295 LIEDMAN: 1977, 9.

ventionella« romanen« (the »conventional« novel) instead of »reportage-romanen« (the reportage novel).²⁹⁶

From Realism to Documentarism and Modernism

Several commentators have claimed that the New Left's promotion of working-class literature helped bring about a revival of aesthetic ideals associated with this tradition in the site of literature. For example, the critic Lars-Olof Franzén has argued that the political reorientation in the 1960s resulted in many Swedish writers »anknyter [...] till en realistisk trettitalstradition« (connecting [...] to a realist tradition from the 1930s), represented by such working-class writers as Ivar Lo-Johansson, Josef Kjellgren, and Rudolf Värnlund, while distancing themselves from »den borgerliga avantgardekulturen« (bourgeois avant-garde culture),²⁹⁷ and a similar argument is also put forward by Tomas Forser and Per Arne Tjäder in the standard work about Swedish literary history, *Den svenska litteraturen* (The Swedish Literature).²⁹⁸ That the revival of working-class literature in Sweden in the late 1960s and the 1970s was, above all, a revival of the realism considered to be the aesthetic backbone of older working-class literature is also argued by the working-class writer and critic Gunder Andersson, who has described it as »en återgång till klassisk berättande realism, genomgående inriktad på psykologisk trovärdighet hos gestalterna och kontinuitet i handlingen« (a return to a classical narrative realism, consequently aiming at psychological credibility in characters and continuity in action) and a rejection of both documentarism and modernist experimentation.²⁹⁹ Wright also claims that the working-class writers of the 1970s like »their role models« from the 1930s cultivated »a straightforward, realistic narrative style.«³⁰⁰ However, even if some of the new working-class writers wrote rather traditional, realistic novels, others dissociated themselves from this aesthetics and instead started experimenting with the forms promoted by the New Left, namely documentarism and modernism.³⁰¹

296 FORSER et.al.: 1972, 9–10.

297 FRANZÉN: 1977.

298 See FORSER and TJÄDER: 1993, 125.

299 ANDERSSON: 1987, 38.

300 WRIGHT: 1996b, 442.

301 See NILSSON: 2006a, 86.

In the 1960s, a revival for documentarism set in in Swedish literature.³⁰² One of the most important results of this was the emergence of the so called report book, a heterogeneous documentary genre, encompassing works ranging from the reportage to the sociological report,³⁰³ that was accompanied by »a distinct performative signal«: »[W]hat it offers is not a presentation of its author's imaginings but a representation of reality, of unadulterated slices of life.«³⁰⁴

Furuland has argued that the report book soon became one of the most important genres within the emerging »dokumentariska arbetarlitteraturen« (documentary working-class literature) in the late 1960s and the 1970s,³⁰⁵ and Bouquet goes even further, claiming that Sture Källberg's *Rapport från en medelsvensk stad: Västerås*, from 1969 (published in English as *Off the Middle Way: Report from a Swedish Village* in 1972), marks the starting point for a »working-class version of Swedish documentarism« which he calls the »report school.«³⁰⁶ To this school belonged, Bouquet argues, such writers as Maja Ekelöf (1918–1989), Marit Paulsen (born 1939), Herta Wirén (1899–1991), Helga Bergwall (1907–1978), Anni Blomqvist (1909–1990), Ingrid Andersson (1918–1994), Linnéa Fjällstedt (born 1929), Solveig Emtö (born 1927), and Erik Johansson (1914–2013).³⁰⁷ Furuland mentions Ekelöf and Paulsen as examples of working-class writers writing report books as well and also argues that some writers of bourgeois background who published report books about the working class – such as Sara Lidman (1923–2004), Göran Palm (born 1931), and Folke Isaksson (1927–2013) – »självlart« (obviously) belong to the tradition of working-class literature since their works connect directly to it.³⁰⁸

Besides highlighting the report book as an important genre within Swedish working-class literature in the late 1960s and the 1970s, Furuland also emphasizes that many writers who »ideologiskt och motivmässigt«

302 See LUNDQVIST: 1981, 50.

303 See OLSSON: 2004, 12.

304 ZILLIACUS: 1979, 97. Ziliacus' argument concerns an entire »documentary category,« namely, the one known as »the ›report,‹ ›reportorial literature,‹ or ›oral history.‹ However, Olsson has demonstrated that the performative signal described by Ziliacus is a central characteristic of the report books published in Sweden in the 1960s and the 1970s (OLSSON: 2004, 22).

305 FURULAND: 1977, 19.

306 BOUQUET: 1997, 101.

307 Ibid.

308 FURULAND: 1977, 19.

(ideologically, and concerning motifs) belong to the tradition of working-class literature – such as Lars-Åke Augustsson (born 1949), Raimond Bengtsson (1922–2003), Jan Fogelbäck (born 1943), Per Forsman (pseudonym for Örjan Nyström, born 1949), Sture Källberg (born 1928), Sven-Olof Lorentzen (born 1949), Henning Mankell, Per Holmer (born 1951), and Arvid Rundberg (1932–2010) – were developing new literary forms »i skärningspunkten mellan kritisk journalistik, dokumentarism och fiktion« (in the intersection between critical journalism, documentarism and fiction).³⁰⁹ Another writer, whom Furuland could very well have added to this list, is Bunny Ragnerstam, who between 1974 and 1978 published four documentary novels, described by Furuland in a later text as »faktaspäckade böcker, avslutade med både stadskarta och personregister enligt mantals- och husförhörslängderna« (books crammed with facts, ending with both a city map and an index of characters from the registers of population and the parish catechetical meetings) and characterized by Wright as adhering strictly to »documentary form.«³¹⁰

Had Furuland published his text only a few years later, he would probably also have included Mary Andersson (born 1929) and Ragnar Järhult (born 1953) to his list of Swedish working-class writers turning to documentarism. For, in his later writing, he describes Andersson's *Asbestarbetarna berättar* (The Asbestos Workers Tell their Stories), from 1980, as a work in which the »dokumentära draget« (documentary strain) is »oerhört påtagligt« (extremely manifest) and uses Järhult's oeuvre as the starting point for a discussion of (the blurring of) »gränsen mellan skönlitteratur å ena sidan och reportage och facklitteratur å den andra« (the border between on the one hand fiction and on the other hand reportage and non-fiction) within Swedish working-class literature.³¹¹

Furuland could, however, also have highlighted that besides this move towards documentarism, Swedish working-class literature from the late 1960s and the 1970s was also characterized by a move towards modernism. One example of this is Mankell's debut novel *Bergsprängaren* (The Rock-Blaster), from 1973, which is written in a highly modernistic style.³¹² Another example is the work of Hans Lagerberg (born 1943), who has

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 321; WRIGHT: 1996b, 444.

³¹¹ FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 321–323.

³¹² See NILSSON: 2004, 186.

been described as the working-class writer from the late 1960s and the 1970s most consequently using »metoder från den litterära modernismen« (methods from literary modernism).³¹³ His debut novel *Vråkens flykt och återkomst* (The Buzzard's Flight and Return) from 1969, challenged »arbetarlitteraturens konventioner« (the conventions of working-class literature), as Furuland puts it, through its »modernistiska form« (modernist form),³¹⁴ and in his subsequent work Lagerberg has continued this challenge. For example, the form of his novel *För att vi ska leva* (So that We can Live), from 1975, has been characterized as being »förtätat modernistisk« (condensedly modernist)³¹⁵ or »proletärmodernistisk« (proletarian-modernist),³¹⁶ and his entire work has been described as an attempt to combine »modernismens idéer om frihet från logikens, gestaltningens och den psykologiska trovärdighetens tvångströja med arbetarlitteraturens traditionella ämnesområden och konflikter« (modernism's ideas about freedom from the straitjacket of logic, creation and psychological credibility with working-class literature's traditional subject areas and conflicts).³¹⁷

The main reason for the turn to documentarism and modernism in Swedish working-class literature in the late 1960s and the 1970s was the widespread belief among working-class writers that the kind of realism associated with older working-class literature may not be the best means for describing such phenomena as class or class injustice. This belief was, in turn, a result of inspiration from the New Left's ideology critique of bourgeois literature. This is made clear not least in Lagerberg's description of how, around the year 1970, he was convinced that »för att undkomma den borgerliga ideologiska hegemonin« (in order to escape the bourgeois ideological hegemony), writers had to »krossa det ›borgerliga formspråket‹« (destroy the »bourgeois formal idiom«) that had »smittat av sig på den proletära romanen« (contaminated the proletarian novel), or in Holmgren's characterization of the report book as the result of attempts to abolish »hela den estetik som den borgerliga romanen vilar på« (the entire aesthetics upon which the bourgeois novel rests).³¹⁸

³¹³ JOHANSSON: 1987, 107.

³¹⁴ FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 323.

³¹⁵ ANDERSSON: 1987, 22.

³¹⁶ JOHANSSON: 1987, 99.

³¹⁷ ANDERSSON: 1987, 40.

³¹⁸ LAGERBERG: 2003, 154; HOLMGREN: 1977, 302.

The New Left thus conditioned the revival of Swedish working-class literature in the late 1960s and the 1970s in a highly complex way. On the one hand, it helped promote and increase the status of working-class literature, both in society at large and in the site of literature. On the other hand, it contributed to the formulation of a critique of the realist aesthetics usually associated with this literature, thereby encouraging working-class writers to innovate the tradition of working-class literature through a turn towards documentarist and modernist forms.

Formal Innovation, Tradition and Literary Class Politics

Good examples of working-class literature displaying influence from the New Left's ideology critique of bourgeois literary forms are Göran Palm's report books *Ett år på LM* (One Year at LM) and *Bokslut från LM* (Closing the Books on LM), in which the author discusses his experiences from a year's work as a manual laborer at LM Ericsson's telephone factory in Stockholm's suburb Midsommarkransen.

On the level of content, the *LM Books* display many similarities with Fridell's novels from the 1940s.³¹⁹ This is especially true regarding the representation and critique of class injustices. As in Fridell's novels, for example, the critique of industrial labor put forward in the *LM Books* is formulated from a Marxist perspective. As Lars-Göran Malmgren has demonstrated, Palm's description of the work process at LM Ericsson is structured by the theory about alienation presented by Marx in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*.³²⁰ That it is also inspired by the critique of the capitalist production process formulated in *Capital* is evidenced by the formulation in *Bokslut från LM* that whereas previously man was »mäster« (master) and the machine »gesäll« (journeyman), »mekaniseringen« (mechanization) has reversed this relationship,³²¹ which brings to the fore Marx's critique of how, under capitalism, it is »the in-

³¹⁹ Following Jennings, I use the term »the *LM Books*« – which is a translation of Malmgren's term *LM-böckerna*« – for references to *Ett år på LM* and *Bokslut från LM* (JENNINGS: 2004, 157; MALMGREN: 1977.) A partial English translation of the *LM Books* has been published under the title *The Flight from Work* (PALM: 1977a.) Where possible, I will quote from this translation. I will also, however, always give references to the Swedish original.

³²⁰ See MALMGREN: 1977, 84.

³²¹ PALM: 1974, 173.

struments of labor that employ the workman.«³²² Palm also (like Fridell) follows Marx in blaming this, not on the machine, but on its use under capitalist conditions:

En slav som inte kan lida, vilken fantastisk möjlighet för människan att äntligen själv befria sig ur slaveri!

Men så har det inte fått bli, eftersom maskinen ställts i den kortsiktiga lönsamhetens och inte i den arbetande människans tjänst. Företagarna har inte satsat en tia på att befria människan med maskinens hjälp.

(A slave that cannot suffer, what a fantastic possibility for man to finally liberate himself from slavery!

But this has not been allowed to happen, because the machine has been used in the service of short-time profitability and not in the service of the laboring man. The employers have not invested ten Swedish crowns in using machinery to liberate man.)³²³

The critique of class injustice in the *LM Books* thus focuses on the capitalist process of production, and this is also true of the ideas about how this injustice can be remedied. For Palm, »arbetets alienation« (the alienation of labor) is, as has been demonstrated by Malmgren, »en maktfråga« (a question about power),³²⁴ and therefore he proposes that the production process be organized around self-governing teams of workers.³²⁵ That this solution resembles the one proposed in Fridell's novels is underlined by Palm himself, who in *Bokslut från LM* approvingly quotes the demand formulated in *Död mans hand* that workers should be allowed to »vara med och dela och bestämma« (share the profits and have a say).³²⁶

Another similarity between the *LM Books* and Fridell's novels from the 1940s is that their representations of class are formulated in explicit dialogue with the idea about the class-less Swedish welfare state. In his book *Indoktrineringen i Sverige* (Indoctrination in Sweden), from 1968, Palm argues that »den vanligaste formen av klassindoktrinering i Sverige« (the most common form of *class indoctrination* in Sweden) is the denial that classes exist and that one important manifestation of this is the claim that the Swedish »klassamhället« (class society) has been replaced by a »välfärdsstat« (welfare state).³²⁷ In the *LM Books*, this claim is criticized

³²² MARX and ENGELS: 1995, 426.

³²³ PALM: 1974, 177.

³²⁴ MALMGREN: 1977, 101.

³²⁵ PALM: 1974, 269–322.

³²⁶ Ibid., 197.

³²⁷ PALM: 1968, 98–99. Emphasis in the original.

in the same way as in Fridell's novels, namely, through challenging two of the central concepts in the reformist discourse about the welfare state: *democracy* and *standard of living*. A good example of this can be found in the following formulation:

Sverige är en demokrati, och den svenska levnadsstandarden är hög. Det är som om den dagliga arbetsdiktaturen inte hade med landets demokratiska status att göra, och det är som om den mödosamma levnaden på jobbet inte hade med medborgarnas standard att göra.³²⁸

(Sweden is a democracy and the Swedish living standard is high. It is as though the daily dictatorship of work had nothing to do with the democratic status of the country, as though the laborious life spent at work had nothing to do with the standard enjoyed by the citizens.)³²⁹

At the time of publication of the *LM Books*, the belief that the welfare state had put an end to class antagonism was – because of, among other things, the rise of the New Left – no longer as dominant as it had been when Fridell published *Död mans hand* and *Greppet hårdnar*.³³⁰ Instead, new narratives about the death of the working class emerged, one of which described how technological change was about to radically transform the traditional class structure of industrial capitalism. Already in *Indoktrineringen i Sverige*, Palm had criticized the idea that because of »automationen [...] arbetare i traditionell bemärkelse inte längre existerar i Sverige« (automatization [...] workers in the traditional sense of the word no longer exist in Sweden), and in the *LM Books*, this critique is further developed.³³¹ In response to the claim that Sweden »står på tröskeln till det postindustriella samhället« (stands on the threshold of the post-industrial society), where the few workers needed in production will get »lindrigare jobb, högre lön och kortare arbetstid« (easier jobs, higher wages, and shorter workdays),³³² for example, Palm argues that manual labor still dominates the production process both at LM Ericsson and in Swedish industry in general and that the main effect of automatization is not the liberation of workers but their transformation into machine slaves.³³³ He also stresses that even if technological change would

³²⁸ PALM: 1974, 226–227.

³²⁹ PALM: 1977a, 151.

³³⁰ See LUNDQVIST: 1981, 45.

³³¹ PALM: 1968, 101.

³³² PALM: 1974, 235

³³³ PALM: 1972a, 37–43.

alter industrial labor in a radical way, this would not necessarily mean the end of exploitation.³³⁴ Thus, Palm claims, »[d]en uppifrån spridda föreställningen om Kropparbetaren som en art stadd i snabbt utdöende i automationens tidsålder« (the from above disseminated idea about the Manual Laborer as a species rapidly becoming extinct in the age of automation) is »en ren och skär bluff« (pure humbug).³³⁵

Yet another similarity between Fridell and Palm is that in their works, they both thematize how hegemonic cultural processes obscuring the class character of Swedish society make it difficult to represent the phenomenon of class. As Malmgren has highlighted, the problem of »att se och fånga verkligheten« (seeing and capturing reality) is an important motif in the *LM Books*, and this problem seems to be particularly acute when it comes to labor.³³⁶ For example, *Ett år på LM* contains a long chapter describing how the narrator is constantly surprised by his experiences of factory work³³⁷ and two chapters describing how these experiences force him to abandon a series of prejudices about the working class.³³⁸

These prejudices are described as products of representations, as when Palm argues that both »[d]e opinionsbildare som förser oss alla med vår dagliga dos av arbetarnunor i TV-rutan och i dagspressen« (the molders of public opinion, who provide us all with our daily dose of workers' mugs on TV and in the newspapers) and the left-wing press are actually peddling clichés.³³⁹ More often, however, Palm discusses how *artistic* representations obscure the realities of class, as in his description of his wonder at not finding any »löpande band av den nervuppslitande typ som Chaplin en gång för alla skildrat i ›Moderna tider« (conveyor belts of the nerve-racking kind once and for all described by Chaplin in »Modern Times«) at LM Ericsson,³⁴⁰ or when he argues that the image of »Proletären med stort P« (the Proletarian with a capital P) found in the works of the Swedish working-class painter Albin Amelin is »förenklad och ihålig« (simplified and hollow).³⁴¹

334 Ibid., 32–33.

335 Ibid., 42.

336 MALMGREN: 1977, 204.

337 PALM: 1972a, 30–78/PALM: 1977a, 9–31.

338 PALM 1972a, 79–101 and 162–188/PALM: 1977a, 66–86.

339 PALM: 1972a, 97–98.

340 Ibid., 32. Emphasis in the original.

341 PALM: 1972a, 181. English translation from: PALM: 1977a, 78.

Above all, Palm criticizes *literary* representations for failing to break through various prejudices about, and misconceptions of, the world of labor. One example of this is the claim that the image of Swedish industry that he has encountered in recent literary works, such as Sara Lidman's *Gruva* (Mine) and Marit Paulsen's *Du människa* (You, Human), does not match his own experiences.³⁴²

Lisa Marie Jennings has pointed out that by »invoking texts such as Lidman's *Gruva* and other treatises that laid claim to the industrial landscape, Palm positions his text both within this discourse and in response to it.«³⁴³ The discourse in question is, I would like to argue, the discourse about class within the tradition of Swedish working-class literature, and, as will be demonstrated below, the position taken by Palm is that this tradition needs to be innovated through the introduction of new forms.

The *LM Books* contain numerous references to working-class literature. Besides the already mentioned quotation of Fridell's slogan that workers »should be allowed to share the profits and have a say« and the critical remarks about Lidman and Paulsen quoted above, one could also mention Palm's referencing of such older working-class writers as Rudolf Värnlund and Ivar Lo-Johansson.³⁴⁴

Palm often expresses a positive view of contemporary working-class literature. One example of this is his use of a quotation from Bertil Carlsson's (born 1935) novel *Smältverksarbetarens son* (The Smelter's Son) to illustrate his own ideas about how workers often feel alienated from intellectual discussions,³⁴⁵ and another is his claim that he recognizes his own experiences of industrial labor in Sture Källberg's and Britta Stövling's (born 1923) works.³⁴⁶ That Palm also has a positive view of older working-class writers can be illustrated with his description of how he tried to convince the trade union at LM Ericsson to include books by Lo-Johansson and Fridell in its book lottery³⁴⁷ or in his acknowledgement that his representation of industrial labor in many ways resembles that in

³⁴² PALM: 1972a, 63/PALM: 1977a, II.

³⁴³ JENNINGS: 2004, 156.

³⁴⁴ PALM: 1974, 71, 79, 97, 171, 194 and 323.

³⁴⁵ PALM: 1972a, 170–171.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁴⁷ PALM: 1974, 71.

Värnlund's novel *Hedningarna som icke hava lagen* (Gentiles, who do Not Have the Law) from 1936.³⁴⁸

As has already been pointed out, however, the *LM Books* also contain a critique of working-class writers' representations of the working class. This critique focuses, above all, on questions about literary form, as indicated by Palm's comment in *Ett år på LM* that *when written in the wrong way*, even revolutionary literature may contribute to the dissemination of reality-obscuring stereotypes about the working class.³⁴⁹

Jennings has argued that Palm's discussion of other literary texts about industrial labor indicates that the *LM Books* are written not only in dialogue with the tradition of working-class literature but also »in response to a growing discourse on the nature of representation.«³⁵⁰ That this discourse is the New Left's ideology critique of bourgeois literary forms has been demonstrated by Malmgren, who has shown that the *LM Books* represent an attempt to »bryta med den borgerliga litterära institutionen« (break with the bourgeois institution of literature).³⁵¹ This view finds support in Palm's claim in an interview from 1968, that »den estetiska kulturen« (aesthetic culture) is a mainly bourgeois phenomenon, and that he considers it necessary to break with »den borgerliga definitionen på begreppet kultur« (the bourgeois definition of the concept of culture).³⁵²

Malmgren places Palm's choice of a »dokumentär metod« (documentary method) at the heart of his attempt to break with bourgeois literature.³⁵³ However, I would like to claim that the term documentary is insufficient for describing the aesthetics in the *LM Books* and that Palm's main attempt to break with bourgeois literary forms consists of a turn towards *modernist* aesthetics.

Palm himself has argued that *Ett år på LM* could very well be described as a »dokumentärt reportage« (documentary reportage), but he has also claimed that this genre is problematic.³⁵⁴ This ambivalence regarding documentarism can be seen in the *LM Books*. On the one hand, they contain references to various documents, mainly in the form of quo-

348 Ibid., 97.

349 PALM: 1972a, 98.

350 JENNINGS: 2004, 157.

351 MALMGREN: 1977, 71.

352 RASMUSSEN and ZERN: 1968, 682–683.

353 MALMGREN: 1977, 71.

354 Ibid., 67.

tations from or references to other books, and in *Ett år på LM* one even finds a facsimile of a form used by the company doctor at LM Ericsson.³⁵⁵ On the other hand, the narrator repeatedly undermines this documentarism. One example of this is his pointing out that he may not have remembered correctly everything he is reporting,³⁵⁶ and another is his admittance in *Bokslut från LM* that some of the quotations in *Ett år på LM* have been edited.³⁵⁷ As Malmgren has pointed out, The *LM Books* also contain »fiktiva element« (fictional elements),³⁵⁸ such as »syntetiska« (»composite«) portraits of workers.³⁵⁹ Thus, it is hardly surprising that, in his preface to an abridged version of *Bokslut från LM*, Palm describes the book as »en korsning mellan dokument och skönlitteratur« (a cross-breed between document and fiction).³⁶⁰

The most interesting result of Palm's attempt in the *LM Books* to merge documentation and fiction is his development of what he calls »retorisk fantasi« (*rhetorical fantasy*).³⁶¹ The main problem for the political author, it says in *Bokslut från LM*, is not »att de flesta missförhållanden är oupptäckta« (that most wrongs have not yet been discovered), but that »de är så grundligt upptäckta att de har blivit invanda« (they have been so thoroughly discovered that we have become accustomed to them).³⁶² Therefore, the author's task is »[i]nte att upptäcka nya problem utan att upptäcka de gamla på nytt« (not to discover new problems, but to discover the old ones anew), to »hitta en angreppsvinkel som får det att se ut som om detta inte vore skildrat förut« (find an angle of attack, which makes it look like this has not been described before) and »ett sätt att tala som gör missförhållandet lika tydligt och angripbart som det tedde sig i början, rakt igenom alla de tjocka lagren av vana och vanmakt« (a way of speaking that makes the wrong as distinct and possible to attack as it appeared in the beginning, straight through all the thick layers of habits and powerlessness).³⁶³ »När läsaren eller lyssnaren plötsligt slås av att det här

355 PALM: 1972a, 22.

356 PALM: 1972a, 14/PALM: 1977a, 3.

357 PALM: 1974, 33.

358 MALMGREN: 1977, 107.

359 Ibid., 76.

360 PALM: 1977b, 10.

361 PALM: 1974, 77. Emphasis in the original.

362 Ibid., 75.

363 Ibid., 76.

har jag inte tänkt på förut och tror sig möta nya tankar och en ny verklighet« (When the reader or listener is suddenly struck by the insight that this, I have never thought about before, or believes that he encounters new ideas and a new reality), Palm writes, »då har den retoriska fantasin slagit till« (then rhetorical fantasy has struck).³⁶⁴

As Malmgren has pointed out, perhaps the most consequent use in the *LM Books* of rhetorical fantasy can be found in the chapter »Personal-administrativ utfrågning« (Personnel department interview) in *Bokslut från LM*, which describes a fictive interview in which a personnel manager questions a female worker about her family life.³⁶⁵ Among other things, he asks her about the organization of household work in her family:

- Det vanliga vid all arbetsuppläggning är faktiskt att det är en som leder arbetet och en annan som utför det.
- Det låter inte klokt. Ska det stå någon och leda mitt köksarbete tar det ju bara längre tid innan maten är klar.
- Men om du är ensam i köket, hur ska de övriga familjemedlemmarna då kunna veta att du verkligen lagar mat? Har du kanske en viss summa per mål?
- Den fick jag nog betala själv i så fall.
- Men då kan det ju hända att du sitter och löser korsord istället för att laga mat?
- Nog skulle jag ha god lust ibland. [---]
- Du sätter alltså de övriga familjemedlemmarna i arbete?
- Ja, när det kniper. Det är bara flickan som brukar hjälpa till frivilligt.
- Får hon timpenning då?
- Hon hjälper till frivilligt, sa jag. [---]
- Du har alltså henne som hantlangare ibland?
- Vi är mera som kamrater. [---]
- Du leder alltså själv det köksarbete du utför och har dessutom inflytande på upphandlingen. Men det måste väl ändå vara någon annan som kontrollerar och godkänner det arbete du utför?
- Är maten vidbränd så får jag nog veta av det. Pojkarna brukar inte hålla inne med vad dom tycker. [---]
- Hur fördelar ni det övriga hemarbetet?
- Bädningen får var och en sköta själv, och städningen sköter vi gemensamt på lediga dagar. Annars gör nog både vi och barnen vad var och en tycker är minst tråkigt.
- Du menar att alla får utföra det hemarbete som de själva är mest intresserade av?
- Ja [...].³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 78.

³⁶⁵ MALMGREN: 1977, 116.

³⁶⁶ PALM: 1974, 256-260.

- ◊The procedure normally adopted in all work organizations is that one party directs the work and another carries it out.◊
 ›Sounds crazy. If someone were to stand there and direct my work in the kitchen it would only mean a longer time before the food was ready.◊
 ›But if you are alone in the kitchen, how are the other members of the family to know that you really are cooking the food? Perhaps you're paid a certain sum for every meal?◊
 ›If I were, I'd have to pay it myself!◊
 ›But in that case you might easily sit there doing the crossword instead of cooking the food?◊
 ›I don't half feel like it sometimes, I can tell you. [---]◊
 ›Do you put the other members of the family to work?◊
 ›Yes, when the time is short. Only the girl usually helps voluntarily.◊
 ›Is she paid by the hour then?◊
 ›She helps voluntarily, I said. [---]◊
 ›So you have her as an assistant sometimes?◊
 ›More as a friend. [---]◊
 ›So you direct the kitchen work you carry out yourself and you also exercise influence over the purchasing. But there must surely be someone who inspects and approves the work you do.◊
 ›If I burn the food they let me know about it soon enough. The boys don't usually keep their opinions to themselves. [...]◊
 ›How do you allocate the remainder of the household work?◊
 ›Everyone does their own beds, and we all give a hand with cleaning up on free days. Otherwise I expect we and the children all do the things we think are least boring.◊
 ›You mean that everyone can carry out the domestic work which they themselves are most interested in?◊
 ›Yes [...].◊³⁶⁷

In this passage, Palm does indeed attack the well known from an angle that makes it appear in a new light. By staging a clash between the world of family life and the world of capitalist labor, he makes visible both the latter's authoritarian character and the former's potential as a model for a more democratic organization of industrial production.

Palm's use of »rhetorical fantasy« can be viewed as a *modernist* strategy. This is hinted at by Palm himself when he uses the modernist poetry of the Nobel Prize-winning author Pär Lagerkvist to exemplify what he means with rhetorical fantasy.³⁶⁸ Malmgren has also pointed out that the method used by Palm in the fictive interview quoted above resembles Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁷ PALM: 1977a, 161–164.

³⁶⁸ PALM: 1974, 77.

³⁶⁹ MALMGREN: 1977, 236.

In his attempt to break with bourgeois literature, Palm mobilizes both documentarism and modernism. Thereby, he distances himself from the realistic aesthetics considered to be the aesthetic backbone of Swedish working-class literature and develops an ambivalent relationship to this tradition. As has already been demonstrated, however, his attitude towards documentarism is also marked by ambivalence, and the same can be said about his attitude towards modernism.

In 2007, Palm published a book documenting his wrestling with modernism for half a century, *Tack, modernismen, för den tid som varit!* (Thank You, Modernism, for the Time We Had!), in which he claims that, already in the early 1960s, he had come to the conclusion that »hela den modernistiska traditionen« (the entire modernist tradition) was characterized by »självförvållad isolering« (self-inflicted isolation) from society and politics, »inbillad klasslöshet« (imagined classlessness), and »individualism« (individualism).³⁷⁰ However, he also claims that until the mid-1980s, he continued writing from *within* the modernist tradition, exploiting what he viewed as »de fruktbara alternativen« (the fruitful alternatives) still existing within it.³⁷¹ This retrospective self-characterization finds support in an essay from 1961, where Palm argues that even if the modernist conventions are »misstroagna mot social nivellering och kollektivism« (distrustful of social leveling and collectivism), it would be virtually impossible to suddenly break with the modernist tradition, or to write »som om den aldrig existerat« (as if it had never existed).³⁷² Instead, Palm claims that modernism must be attacked from within and its »experimentella anda« (experimental spirit) turned into a platform for attacking its »hermetiska ideal« (hermetic ideals).³⁷³

A Farewell to Literature?

The development of working-class literature in West Germany in the late 1960s and the 1970s in many ways resembles that in Sweden during the same time. Like their Swedish colleagues, many West-German working-class writers were influenced by the ideology critique of bourgeois litera-

³⁷⁰ PALM: 2007, 7.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 9–10.

³⁷² Ibid., 23.

³⁷³ Ibid., 24.

ture formulated within the New Left, and as in Sweden, this led to attempts at formal innovation.

In West Germany, however, the New Left's ideology critique of bourgeois literature was generally more radical than in Sweden, and often it almost turned into a rejection of literature as such.³⁷⁴ A good example of this can be found in a special issue of *Alternative* (one of the West-German New Left's most important publications) about working-class literature. The issue's title, *Arbeiterliteratur – Zerstörung der Literatur* (Working-Class Literature – The Destruction of Literature), posits a radical incompatibility between the two elements in the concept of working-class literature, and this idea is further elaborated in the editing collective's foreword, where it is argued that the very »Produktionsgesetze literarischer Formen« (laws of production of literary forms) are incompatible with the ambition to represent proletarian class reality.³⁷⁵ A precondition for working-class literature's promotion of proletarian class consciousness is thus, the editors argue, »die Zerstörung des Literaturbegriffs« (the destruction of the concept of literature).³⁷⁶ A similar argument is also put forward in the same issue of *Alternative* in Günter Stack's analysis of Peter Neunier's novel *Akkord ist Mord* (Piecework is Murder). According to Stack, »die Romanform« (the novel form) imposes limits on the author's representation of class.³⁷⁷ One such limitation, he claims, is that »[d]ie Gesetze des Romans« (the laws of the novel), as well as the laws »der literarischen Produktion« (of literary production) in general, demand an individualized protagonist, which in turn makes invisible his or her identity as a member of the working class.³⁷⁸ Thus, Stack argues, »die Widersprüche des Kapitals« (capital's contradictions) cannot be represented in literature.³⁷⁹

One of the most important tendencies in West-German working-class literature in the late 1960s was a turn towards documentarism. The two most prominent representatives of this development were Günter Wallraff and Erika Runge. Wallraff published his first book – a collection of re-

³⁷⁴ See CHO: 2000, 52.

³⁷⁵ REDAKTIONSKOLLEKTIV ALTERNATIVE: 1973a, 113.

³⁷⁶ REDAKTIONSKOLLEKTIV ALTERNATIVE: 1973b, 129.

³⁷⁷ STACK: 1973, 132.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 136.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

portages from the world of industrial labor entitled »*Wir brauchen dich*«: *Als Arbeiter in deutschen Industriebetrieben*³⁸⁰ (»We Need You«: As a Worker in German Industrial Firms) – in 1966, and got his definitive breakthrough in 1969 with *13 unerwünschte Reportagen* (13 Undesired Reportages). Runge, who had a background as a maker of documentary films, made a successful literary debut in 1968 with *Bottroper Protokolle* (Bottrop Protocols), a book consisting of transcriptions of tape-recorded interviews from the industrial town of Bottrop.

That the increased interest among working-class writers in documentary forms, which was part of a more general wave of documentarism in West-German literature, was connected to the ideology critique of bourgeois literary forms put forward by the New Left can be illustrated with the following quotation from Martin Walser's foreword to *Bottroper Protokolle*, where Runge's text is presented as the antithesis of bourgeois literature:

Alle Literatur ist bürgerlich. Bei uns. Auch wenn sie sich noch so antibürgerlich gebärdet. Ich bin nicht so sicher, daß sie nichts als »affirmativ« sei, aber bürgerlich ist sie sicher. Das heißt: sie drückt bürgerliche Existenz aus, Leben unter bürgerlichen Umständen, Gewissen, Genuß, Hoffnung und Kater in bürgerlicher Gesellschaft. Arbeiter kommen in ihr vor wie Gänseblümchen, Ägypter, Sonnenstaub, Kreuzritter und Kondensstreifen. Arbeiter kommen in ihr vor. Mehr nicht.

Hier, in diesem Buch, kommen sie zu Wort. Wer diese Aussagen und Erzählungen gelesen hat, wird wünschen, daß Erika Runge sich wieder auf den Weg macht mit ihrem Tonbandgerät, um weitere Bottrops aufzunehmen, weitere von böser Erfahrung geschärfte Aussagen, weiter Seufzer, Flüche, Sprüche und Widersprüche, weitere Zeugnisse einer immer noch nach minderem Recht lebenden Klasse.

(All literature is bourgeois. Our literature. Even when it acts ever so anti-bourgeois. I am not sure that it is always »affirmative,« but it is without doubt bourgeois. This means: it expresses bourgeois existence, life under bourgeois conditions, conscience, pleasure, hope and hangover in bourgeois society. Workers appear in it as daisies, Egyptians, sun dust, crusaders and condensation trails. Workers appear in it. Nothing more.

Here, in this book, they have their say. Those who have read these statements and stories will wish that Erika Runge will again set out with her tape recorder to record more Bottrops, more statements sharpened by bad experiences, more sighs, curses, proclamations and contradictions, more testimonies from a class still not granted its rights.)³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ Re-published in 1970 as *Industriereportagen* (Reportages from Industry).

³⁸¹ RUNGE: 2008, 9–10.

Wallraff and Runge were members of Gruppe 61. In 1970, however, they both took an active part in the founding of a new organization for the promotion of working-class literature: the *Werkkreis Literatur der Arbeitswelt* (Work Circle: Literature of the World of Labor). In the organization's program, it is stated that the WLA is »eine Vereinigung von Arbeitern und Angestellten, die in örtlichen Werkstätten mit Schriftstellern, Journalisten und Wissenschaftlern zusammenarbeiten« (an association of workers and salaried employees, who work together with writers and journalists in local workshops) and that its aim is to promote »die Darstellung der Situation abhängig Arbeitender« (descriptions of the subordinate worker's conditions) that will help promote consciousness about the »Probleme der Arbeitswelt« (problems of the world of labor) and contribute to social change »im Interesse der Arbeitenden« (in the interest of the workers).³⁸²

The understanding of literature within the WLA was, as has been demonstrated by Kyu-Hee Cho, very much influenced by the New Left's critique of bourgeois literature.³⁸³ This can be seen in the foreword to one of the group's first publications, the anthology *Ein Baukran stürzt um* (A Lifting Crane Overturns), from 1970. Gruppe 61, the editors argue, had had the ambition to create a literature »die die Arbeitswelt und die Lebensbedingungen der Arbeiter sich zum Thema nimmt« (thematizing the world of labor, and the workers' living conditions), but unfortunately this was done with the point of departure in »eine Vorstellung von Kunst und Literatur (der bürgerlichen), deren Tauglichkeit für die neue Aufgabe nicht genügend überprüft wurde« (an understanding of art and literature (the bourgeois one), whose suitability for this new task had not been sufficiently tested).³⁸⁴ They also claim that Gruppe 61 was oriented towards the »Maßstäben und Praktiken des bürgerlichen Literaturbetriebs« (standards and practices of the bourgeois business of literature) and that it never asked the question whether »eine für die arbeitende Bevölkerung relevante Literatur« (a literature relevant for the workers) could be based on the same »Formen, Verbreitungsweisen und Beurteilungsprinzipien

³⁸² RÖHRER, KAMMRAD and SCHMID: 1971, 194.

³⁸³ CHO: 2000, 16 and 66–72.

³⁸⁴ WERKKREIS 70: 1970, 10.

[...] wie die bürgerliche Literatur« (literary forms, forms for distribution, and judgment principles [...] as the bourgeois literature).³⁸⁵

The condemnation within the WLA of the allegedly bourgeois understanding of literature in Gruppe 61 seems to have been more or less unanimous. Concerning the alternatives, however, there were differing views. As has been demonstrated by Horst Hensel, two positions dominated in the initial discussions. The first of these was the promotion of documentarism of the kind advocated by Wallraff.³⁸⁶ Perhaps the most extreme advocate of this position was Peter Kühne, who argued that Wallraff's documentarism was the only useful method for producing socially committed literature.³⁸⁷ The other view was articulated by, among others, Peter Shütt,³⁸⁸ who criticized the New Left's tendency to view documentary literature as »alleinseligmachendem Darstellungsverfahren« (the one and only saving form for representation) and its »Überschätzung« (overestimation) of this literature as »einzige rationale, nicht manipulative Alternative zur Dichtung des Bürgertums« (the only rational, not manipulative alternative to the poetry of the bourgeoisie).³⁸⁹ As an alternative to this fetishizing of documentarism, Schütt promoted the use of a variety of literary forms, including short stories, anecdotes, and poetry.³⁹⁰

Soon, however, this conflict was resolved.³⁹¹ Documentation and fiction were no longer seen as being antithetic,³⁹² and traditional literary forms were no longer viewed as being inferior to documentarism.³⁹³ Instead, a kind of formal pluralism or eclecticism was promoted, as in an article published by three WLA members in 1971, where it was argued that working-class writers may very well use »für den bürgerlichen Kunstverstand begreifbare literarische Formen« (literary forms compatible with the bourgeois understanding of art), as long as they do so in order to promote »Bewußtsein« (consciousness) and »Veränderung« (change).³⁹⁴

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ HENSEL: 1980, 68.

³⁸⁷ See CHO: 2000, 77.

³⁸⁸ See HENSEL: 1980, 75; CHO: 2000, 81–82.

³⁸⁹ SCHÜTT: 1970, 73.

³⁹⁰ See CHO: 2000, 82.

³⁹¹ See REINHOLD: 1976, 296.

³⁹² See HENSEL: 1978, 342.

³⁹³ See SAGARA: 1981 293.

³⁹⁴ RÖHRER, KAMMRAD and SCHMID: 1971, 194–196.

This idea – which was actually formulated already in the WLA’s program from 1970, where it says that the organization promotes »[a]lle erprobten und neuen Formen realistischer Gestaltung« (all established and new forms for realistic representation)³⁹⁵ – then manifested itself in the literary production within the WLA, where different forms of »Reportage, Bericht, Protokoll, Dokumentation und Fiktion« (reportage, report, protocol, documentation and fiction) were used.³⁹⁶

Kenichi Sagara has pointed out that this pluralist attitude towards literary forms was influenced by Brecht.³⁹⁷ This is made clear not least in the publication *Realistisch schreiben* (Writing Realistically), which documents a WLA meeting held in 1972. In the summary of the discussions in a workshop about realism, for example, Brecht’s plaidoyer for a »Vielfalt der realistischen Schreibweise« (multiplicity of realist writing practices)³⁹⁸ are presented in a very positive way.³⁹⁹ Brecht’s importance for the discussions about aesthetics within the WLA is also highlighted in the foreword to *Partei ergreifen* (Taking Side), a text documenting a meeting in 1974.⁴⁰⁰

However, as Cho has underlined, the reception of Brecht’s aesthetics within the WLA was rather superficial and one-sided and seems to have functioned mainly as a pretext for avoiding a more serious discussion of questions about literary forms.⁴⁰¹ Soon the will to formal experimentation also diminished within the WLA, and traditional narrative forms eventually came to dominate its literary production.⁴⁰²

Instead of trying to challenge bourgeois literature through the development of new literary forms, the WLA – influenced by the Marxist philosopher Oskar Negt’s theories about *die proletarische Öffentlichkeit* (the proletarian public sphere) and by political strategies developed within the New Left – chose the strategy of building an autonomous proletarian site of literature.⁴⁰³ As is emphasized in the organization’s program,

395 Ibid., 194.

396 SAGARA: 1981, 292–293.

397 Ibid., 294.

398 WERKKREIS LITERATUR DER ARBEITSWELT: 1972, 59.

399 See DEUBER: 1975, 127.

400 WERKKREIS LITERATUR DER ARBEITSWELT: 1974, I.

401 CHO: 2000, 217.

402 See *ibid.*, 274.

403 See *ibid.*, 71 and 79.

one important feature of this strategy was the attempt to create an infrastructure for the distribution and reception of literature which would be independent from the site of national literature and the literary market.⁴⁰⁴ Above all, however, it was in its conception of literary *production* that the WLA managed to create an alternative to traditional literary ideals. One of the organization's most distinct features was its promotion of collectivity as an ideal for literary production.⁴⁰⁵ Ideally, texts were to be written collectively and then critiqued and discussed within the organization before being published. Hereby, Sagara argues, the WLA wanted to break »mit dem ›freien‹, bürgerlich-individualistischen Schriftsteller« (with the »free,« bourgeois-individualistic writer) celebrated in the site of national literature,⁴⁰⁶ an ambition which was explicitly formulated by Wallraff in an interview in 1973, where he argued that the kind of writer emerging within the WLA represents the very antithesis to the bourgeois writer.⁴⁰⁷

Within the WLA, the attitude towards older working-class literature was highly ambivalent. The organization came into existence as a break-away group from Gruppe 61, and therefore its self-image was constructed around an idea of a break with the West-German working-class literature of the 1960s already from the start. In part, however, this break was conceptualized as a return to an older tradition, which Gruppe 61 was accused of having betrayed. A good example of this can be found in the foreword to *Ein Baukran stürzt um*, where it is argued that Gruppe 61's understanding of art owed more to the allegedly bourgeois Gruppe 47 than to the tradition of working-class literature.⁴⁰⁸

Above all, Gruppe 61 was criticized for failing to keep alive the heritage from the revolutionary working-class literature of the Weimar republic, as when three WLA members – Wolfgang Röhrer, Horst Kammrad, and Harald Schmid – argued that Gruppe 61's relationship to this part of the tradition of working-class literature was best understood as an

404 See RÖHRER, KAMMRAD and SCHMID: 1971, 194. For a detailed discussion of the WLA's attempts to create an autonomous infrastructure for the distribution and reception of working-class literature, see CHO: 2000, 102–110.

405 See *ibid.*, 90.

406 SAGARA: 1981, 290.

407 See GÖRTZ: 1973, 180.

408 BREDTHAUER et al.: 1970, 12.

»Ablehnung« (rejection).⁴⁰⁹ Within the WLA, on the other hand, the revolutionary working-class writers of the 1920s were often mentioned as important sources of inspiration. In the introduction to *Realistisch schreiben*, for example, the »Arbeiterkorrespondentbewegung« (worker-correspondent movement) and the »Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller« (association for proletarian-revolutionary writers) of the Weimar Republic were presented as having had similar aims as the WLA,⁴¹⁰ and the same view was also put forward by Wallraff.⁴¹¹ One of the WLA's leading theorists, Erasmus Schöfer, even argued that the organization's concept of »Literatur der Arbeitswelt« (literature from the world of labor) was synonymous with that of »proletarisch-revolutionäre Literatur« (proletarian-revolutionary literature).⁴¹² Thus, it is hardly surprising that several scholars have emphasized the similarities between the WLA and the revolutionary working-class literature from the Weimar Republic.⁴¹³ At the same time, however, many of the members of the WLA insisted on keeping a certain distance to this literature, for example, by arguing that it belonged to a very different historical situation⁴¹⁴ and that connecting to it could thus not mean that »deren Formen und Inhalte mechanisch übernommen werden« (its forms and content are taken over mechanically)⁴¹⁵ but that »[d]ie Fortführung der Tradition« (continuing the tradition) must mean »aus der Tradition lernen« (learning from the tradition).⁴¹⁶

Rejecting or Re-Functioning Literature?

Wallraff's reportages from the world of labor were very well received in Sweden and exercised substantial influence on many Swedish writers.⁴¹⁷ Thus, it is hardly surprising that Palm's *Ett år på LM* has been described

⁴⁰⁹ RÖHRER, KAMMRAD and SCHMID: 1971, 182.

⁴¹⁰ WERKKREIS LITERATUR DER ARBEITSWELT: 1972, IV.

⁴¹¹ See GÖRTZ: 1973, 178.

⁴¹² WERKKREIS LITERATUR DER ARBEITSWELT: 1972, II.

⁴¹³ See DITHMAR: 1973, 76; STIEG and WITTE: 1973, 143–145.

⁴¹⁴ See WERKKREIS LITERATUR DER ARBEITSWELT: 1972, 52.

⁴¹⁵ WERKKREIS LITERATUR DER ARBEITSWELT: 1974, I.

⁴¹⁶ WERKKREIS LITERATUR DER ARBEITSWELT: 1972, 49–51.

⁴¹⁷ See HALLBERG: 1977, 265.

as a work in the spirit of Wallraff.⁴¹⁸ However, even though there are similarities between the *LM Books* and Wallraff's reportages, there are also differences. One of the most important of these is that whereas Wallraff's attempts to break with a bourgeois conception of literature led to him adopting a negative attitude towards literature as such, Palm attempted to achieve this break *within* the realm of literature.

A typical example of Wallraff's rejection of the very concept of literature can be found in an interview from 1970, where he argues that Gruppe 61 had been successful both in politicizing West-German literature and in drawing attention to the world of industrial labor in the public sphere but that the time had now come to leave the realm of literature and instead turn to »Dokumentation« (documentation) as a means for further politicizing working-class writing.⁴¹⁹ In another interview, given two years later, he went even further, claiming that he had never had the ambition »als Literat gefeiert zu werden« (to be celebrated as a writer of literature) or a creator of »Kunst« (art), and he praised the WLA for trying to create a literature that does not want to be literature.⁴²⁰ He also argued that any poetic passages in his works should be viewed as residues from a time when he still had literary ambitions and that he was now striving to cleanse his texts from such »Schwächen« (weaknesses).⁴²¹

In part, Wallraff's rejection of literature must be viewed as a pose. This has been stressed by Jennings, who has argued that the quotations above represent »Wallraff at his provocative best.«⁴²² It could also be mentioned that in the interviews from which these quotations are taken, Wallraff actually relativized his own anti-literary discourse, for example, by claiming that fiction sometimes has advantages over documentarism⁴²³ or admitting that he himself uses »künstlerische Mittel« (artistic means).⁴²⁴

Nevertheless, this pose does distinguish Wallraff from Palm. In the late 1950s and the early 1960s, Palm had made a name for himself as a poet and a literary critic. During the second half of the 1960s, however, he

⁴¹⁸ See LAGERLÖF: 1975, 29. Wallraff himself has also compared his later reportages with the *LM Books* (see BRAUN: 2007, 122).

⁴¹⁹ BETH: 1971, 157–158.

⁴²⁰ GÖRTZ: 1973, 174–181.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 182.

⁴²² JENNINGS: 2004, 154.

⁴²³ See GÖRTZ: 1973, 177.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 181.

turned »från poesi till sakprosa« (from poetry to non-fiction prose), with the publication of three book-long political essays: *En orättvis betraktelse* (published in English as *As others see us*), *Indoktrineringen i Sverige* (The Indoctrination in Sweden), and *Vad kan man göra?* (What Can Be Done?).⁴²⁵ According to Malmgren, this has often been understood as »en brytning med litteraturen« (a break with literature) and a turn to »politiken« (politics).⁴²⁶ However, this view was repudiated by Palm. »[J]ag har inte slutat ägna mig åt litteratur och litteraturkritik« (I have not given up literature and literary criticism), he said in an interview from 1968:

Jag tycker att det jag nu skriver kräver lika stor estetisk medvetenhet som det jag skrev då. En orättvis betraktelse är i mycket uppbyggd som en prosadikt, och indoktrineringsboken rymmer en hel del litteraturkritiska inslag.

(In my opinion, what I write now demands as much aesthetic awareness as what I wrote then. As others see us is to a large extent constructed as a prose poem, and the book about indoctrination contains a fair amount of literary criticism.)⁴²⁷

Palm then goes on to argue that his non-fiction works from the 1960s should be treated as literature since they are characterized by »formell« (formal) and »estetisk« (aesthetic) consciousness.⁴²⁸ Moreover, in a programmatic article published in 1969, Palm argues that the socialist writer's task is to »väcka och fördjupa den medvetenhet som stimulerar till kollektiv handling och att åstadkomma denna väckelse och fördjupning med hjälp av *konstens* alla tänkbara verkningsmedel« (awaken and deepen consciousness of the kind that stimulates collective action, and to achieve this awakening and deepening with the help of all imaginable *artistic* means).⁴²⁹

Thus, Malmgren argues, Palm's move away from poetry in the 1960s should not be seen as an abandoning of literature, but as a turn from »relativism« (relativism) to »ideologikritik« (ideology critique) and as a »omfunktionering av konstnärliga redskap« (re-functioning of artistic means), aiming at making possible the use of *literary* forms for *political*

425 MALMGREN: 1977, 21.

426 Ibid., 21–22.

427 RASMUSSEN and ZERN: 1968, 68r.

428 Ibid., 682.

429 PALM: 1972b, 235. Emphasis added.

purposes.⁴³⁰ That this is also how he views the *LM Books* is made clear in his characterization of the method used by Palm as »ett sätt att bryta med den borgerliga litterära institutionen och uppnå en politisk funktion« (a means for breaking free of the bourgeois institution of literature and achieving a political function) for literature.⁴³¹ That this view comes close to Palm's own self-understanding can be seen in *Bokslut från LM*, where he insists that the *LM Books* should be treated as literature since their political effects are achieved by rhetorical means.⁴³² In the *LM Books*, Palm also repeatedly claims that works of literature often have a greater political impact than, for example, academic or journalistic texts.⁴³³

As Jennings has pointed out, Palm thus »call[s] into question the ›rejection of ›art« and the literary‹ often touted along with documentary impulses and political commitment to working-class issues as main components of the Leftist program of the 1960s.«⁴³⁴ Whereas Wallraff and other West-German working-class writers distanced themselves from literature, Palm instead claimed »a *literary* space« for social criticism.⁴³⁵

In addition to Palm, many other Swedish working-class writers, including writers using documentary or semi-documentary forms, insisted on staying in literature. Maja Ekelöf's report book *Rapport från en skurhink* (Report from a Scouring Pail), from 1968, for example, is ripe with literary references – to, among others, Harry Martinson⁴³⁶ – a fact that Annika Olsson interprets as being indicative of the author's ambition to »delta i ett *litterärt* samtal« (take part in a *literary* conversation).⁴³⁷ Olsson also highlights that Ekelöf consequently describes literature »i positiva ordalag« (in positive terms).⁴³⁸

The critique of bourgeois literature was thus more radical in West Germany than in Sweden. This can be further illustrated through a comparison between FiB/K and the WLA. Wallraff has presented FiB/K as

430 MALMGREN: 1977, 21–51.

431 Ibid., 71.

432 PALM: 1974, 79–80.

433 Ibid., 57–58, 78 and 104.

434 JENNINGS: 2004, 6.

435 Ibid., 21. Emphasis added.

436 EKELÖF: 1970, 12, 20, 39, 42, 106, and 127.

437 OLSSON: 2004, 271. Emphasis added.

438 Ibid., 272.

a model for the WLA's attempts to build a proletarian counter public sphere.⁴³⁹ However, whereas for the WLA, autonomy from the site of national literature was a goal in itself, for FiB/K it was part of a strategy aiming at challenging the dominant ideals in this site, as well as in society in general. That FiB/K's literary politics had such goals is indicated, for example, in Ylva Holm's opening address at the organization's conference on literature, where she proudly claimed that interest in working-class literature had increased massively in Sweden in recent years and that this development, which she exemplified with the commercial success of new editions of Lo-Johansson's works, was, »i stor utsträckning« (to a large extent), a product of FiB/K's activities.⁴⁴⁰

In the late 1960s and the 1970s, West-German working-class writers thus displayed a more negative attitude than did their Swedish colleagues toward the national site of literature as well as to the phenomenon of literature as such. The critic Thomas von Vegesack has highlighted that this was a product of specific conditions in the site of literature. In »ett annat litterärt klimat« (a different literary climate), he has claimed, documentarists such as Wallraff and Runge would probably have »ägnat sig åt diktning« (dedicated themselves to fiction).⁴⁴¹

In his preface to *Das schwedische Modell der Ausbeutung* (The Swedish Exploitation Model) – an anthology containing German translations of texts by Swedish working-class writers, including Fridell and Lidman – Wallraff makes an argument that could perhaps be read as support for Vegesack's claim: »Sollte dieses Buch Kulturbeflissenen in die Hände fallen« (Should this book fall into the hands of those dedicating themselves to culture), Wallraff writes, »dann [...] werden sie sich aufgrund langgeübter Enthaltensamkeit gesellschaftlichen Realitäten gegenüber wehren, die hier aufgezeigten Mißstände [...] anders als mit literarisch-ästhetischen Kriterien zu bewerten« (then [...] they would, because of their long-practiced alienation from social reality, refuse to assess the bad conditions that are revealed here [...] with other criteria than literary-aesthetic ones).⁴⁴² The reason for this, Wallraff argues, is that in West Germany the literati promote literature in order to draw attention away

439 See GÖRTZ: 1973, 176.

440 HOLM: 1977, 4.

441 VEGESACK: 1970, 23.

442 WALLRAFF: 1971, 7.

from society, and writers are assigned the task of »die Mehrheit der Bevölkerung von ihren klassenmäßigen Interessen [...] abzulenken« (diverting the majority of the population away from their class interests).⁴⁴³ In Sweden, however, the situation seems to be different. Here, working-class writers enjoy a much higher status than their West-German colleagues:

In der Bundesrepublik sind es die »Werkstätten für Literatur der Arbeitswelt«, [...] die eine ähnliche Zielsetzung haben wie die hier vorgestellten Autoren. Mit dem Unterschied, daß die schwedischen »Wortarbeiter« im ganzen Land und speziell bei der Zielgruppe der Arbeiter bekannt sind und an Auflagenhöhe ihrer Bücher die konservativen Schreiber Schwedens in den Schatten stellen.

(In the Bundesrepublik, it is the »Workshops for literature of the world of labor« [...] that have goals that are similar to those of the writers presented here. With the difference that the Swedish »word workers« are well known in the whole country, especially among the workers, and that they put the conservative writers in Sweden in the shade when it comes to circulation figures.)⁴⁴⁴

Wallraff's description is clearly exaggerated, and its main aim is probably not to give an accurate description of the literary climate in Sweden, but to criticize conditions in West-German literature. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that in the late 1960s and the 1970s, working-class literature enjoyed a higher status in Sweden than it did in West Germany. Whereas many West-German critics refused to recognize Wallraff's works as literature,⁴⁴⁵ for example, such Swedish working-class writers as Palm and Ekelöf came to occupy central positions in the site of national literature. Further, whereas the literature produced within the WLA was seldom well received by critics,⁴⁴⁶ the Swedish New Left's literary politics had a rather substantial impact on the literary climate. Many of the working-class writers publishing literature with the New Left's publishing houses, for example, eventually moved on to more established publishers and to central positions in the site of literature, and one of these publishing houses (Ordfront) eventually became one of Sweden's leading presses.⁴⁴⁷

The relatively high status enjoyed by working-class literature in the site of national literature in Sweden probably conditioned the Swedish working-class writers' attempts to break with bourgeois literature by chal-

443 Ibid.

444 Ibid., 10.

445 See VORMWEG: 1986, 319.

446 See SAGARA: 1981, 294.

447 See FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 317.

lenging the idea that literature as such should be regarded as a bourgeois phenomenon as well as by encouraging an understanding of working-class literature as a *literary* phenomenon. Thus, this status probably contributed both to the fact that the Swedish New Left's ideology critique of bourgeois literature did not become a critique of literature as such as well as to making Swedish working-class writers less inclined than their West-German colleagues to attempt to *break with literature*.

Innovation as Repetition

The main reason for Swedish working-class literature's relatively high status in the site of national literature in the late 1960s and the 1970s was the consecration of *the tradition* of working-class literature as a central strand in modern Swedish literature. Thus, this tradition contributed to legitimizing the view of working-class literature as a *literary* phenomenon. However, it also constituted an archive of aesthetical-political strategies for the challenging of bourgeois literature, which could serve as a source of inspiration in contemporary struggles in the site of literature. For, ideology critique of established aesthetic ideals and experimentation with literary forms in order to make possible the formulation of a proletarian critique of class society were certainly no new phenomena within Swedish working-class literature.

For example, already in the 1940s, the working-class writer Lars Ahlin (1915–1997) formulated a radical ideology critique of dominant literary ideals and attempted to innovate working-class literature through formal experimentation. This received much attention from both critics within the New Left and working-class writers in the late 1960s and the 1970s. In fact, the New Left's critique of working-class literature's commitment to realism was to a large extent based on a reading of Ahlin by one of the most influential Marxist critics of the time, namely Arne Melberg, who argued that Ahlin's works represented an attempt to develop »arvet från den s k proletärlitteraturen« (the heritage from the so called proletarian literature) through a »avståndstagande från dess [...] estetiska uttrycksformer« (repudiation of its [...] aesthetic forms of expression)⁴⁴⁸ in general, and its commitment to what Melberg calls »illusionsromanen« (the

⁴⁴⁸ MELBERG: 1973, 101.

illusion novel)⁴⁴⁹ – by which he means the realist novel in the tradition of Flaubert and Henry James⁴⁵⁰ – in particular. Several commentators have also underlined that Ahlin was an important source of inspiration for many working-class writers in the late 1960s and the 1970s. The working-class writer Kjell Johansson, for example, has argued that Lagerberg's novels display influences from Ahlin,⁴⁵¹ and Lagerberg himself has declared that his distrust of »illusionsromanen« (the illusion novel) was a product of inspiration from Ahlin.⁴⁵² In *Bokslut från LM*, Palm also quotes Ahlin in a discussion of the possibilities of creating a counter-hegemonic language.⁴⁵³

However, Ahlin was not the first Swedish working-class writer trying to innovate the tradition of working-class literature by challenging established literary forms. In 1938, for example, Lo-Johansson published an article in which he claimed that the introduction into literature of a new aspect of reality (by which he meant working-class reality) necessitated the development of »en ny konstnärlig uppfattning« (a new artistic perception), »en ny stil« (a new style), and, preferably, »en ny litterär teknik« (a new literary technique), and that the working-class writers of the 1930s had tried to break with »den individualistiska-subjektiva-lyrisk romanen, vilken hittills konstituerat svensk prosalitteratur« (the individualistic-subjective-lyrical novel hitherto dominating Swedish prose literature), by developing such new forms as that of »kollektivromanen« (the collective novel).⁴⁵⁴ Even though he sometimes criticized other working-class writers (as well as himself) for not being radical enough in their attempts to break with bourgeois literature, Lo-Johansson did, toward the end of his life, argue that whereas »[d]en tidigaste svenska arbetarlitteraturen« (the earliest Swedish working-class literature) had depended formally on »den borgerliga romanen« (the bourgeois novel) the working-class writers of the 1930s had in fact managed to develop a new »stil« (style) and a new collective aesthetics.⁴⁵⁵

449 Ibid., 103.

450 Ibid., II.

451 JOHANSSON: 1987, 100.

452 LAGERBERG: 2003, 24.

453 PALM: 1974, 44.

454 LO-JOHANSSON: 1946, 185–188.

455 LO-JOHANSSON: 1988, 107.

Among the most important attempts in Swedish working-class literature of the 1930s at developing a collective novel were Josef Kjellgren's *Människor kring en bro* (People Around a Bridge), Rudolf Värnlund's *Man bygger ett hus* (A House is being Built), and Lo-Johansson's *Traktorn* (The Tractor).⁴⁵⁶ But Swedish working-class writers' attempts to break with bourgeois literature during this decade also involved experimentation with both documentarism and modernism.

Philippe Bouquet has highlighted that the »notion of documentary writing was not foreign to [...] Swedish »proletarian« literature of the 1930s.«⁴⁵⁷ As support for this claim, he points to Kjellgren's *Människor kring en bro*, whose narrative about the building of a bridge is interspersed with documentary material in 13 sections entitled »Arbetsjournal« (work journal) and two sections entitled »Konkreta iakttagelser« (concrete observations), the former being based on documents from the Port of Stockholm Authority and the latter containing facts about the harbor and various bridges in Stockholm taken mainly from a book compiling statistical information.⁴⁵⁸

The documentarism in *Människor kring en bro* marks the high point of a general »rörelse bort från fiktionen, mot det dokumentära« (movement away from fiction, towards the documentary) in Kjellgren's writing.⁴⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Kjellgren is best known as a modernist poet. The main reason for this is that he was one of the contributors to the poetry collection *Fem unga* (The Young Five), the publication of which in 1929 is generally considered to be one of the most important manifestations of »the breakthrough of the international modernist movement« in Sweden.⁴⁶⁰

However, the publication of *Fem unga* was also a central event in the breakthrough of working-class literature in the site of national literature in Sweden. Like Kjellgren, the other contributors to the anthology – Artur Lundkvist (1906–1991), Harry Martinson, Gustav Sandgren (1904–1983),

456 See WRIGHT: 1996a, 346; KVART: 1979, 161–174; MATTSSON 1989, 112; LANDGREN 2011. *Traktorn* was published in 1943 but has, because of its style and its subject matter, more in common with the working-class literature of the 1930s than with the literature of the 1940s.

457 BOUQUET: 1997, 102.

458 See KVART: 1979, 150–151.

459 Ibid., 61.

460 WRIGHT: 1992b, 263.

and Erik Ask Lund (1908–1980) – had working-class backgrounds, and around the year 1930, they presented themselves, and were generally viewed, as working-class writers. Several of them also published works that were easily recognizable as working-class literature. Harry Martinson, for example, published two of the most famous proletarian novels of the 1930s, namely *Nässlorna blomma* (published in English as *Flowering Nettle*) and *Vägen ut* (*The Way Out*). In addition to this, both the »modernists« and the »epic realists« of working-class background, as has been pointed out by Rochelle Wright and Susan Brantley, »saw themselves as radicals in opposition to literary norms determined by the conventional, bourgeois writers and critics who dominated the literary scene«⁴⁶¹ and actively questioned »the assumptions of traditional bourgeois society.«⁴⁶²

The modernist poetry of *Fem unga* was thus an integral part of Swedish working-class literature in the 1930s and of this literature's challenging of the bourgeois hegemony in the national site of literature, which at the same time constituted a powerful attempt at formal renewal of the tradition of working-class literature. This has been pointed out by Martin Kylhammar:

Visst var *Fem unga* en del av arbetargenombrottet i svensk litteratur [...] Men de yngsta lyrikerna stack emellertid lika mycket av från arbetartraditionen som de tillhörde den. [...] De var också förnyare av [...] arbetardikten.

(To be sure, The Young Five were a part of the working-class breakthrough in Swedish literature [...]. But the youngest poets nevertheless deviated from the working-class tradition to the same extent that they belonged to it. [...] They were also innovators of [...] working-class writing.)⁴⁶³

The attempts by Swedish working-class writers in the late 1960s and the 1970s to break with bourgeois literature by turning to modernism and documentarism were thus anticipated within the tradition of working-class literature. This has been noted by several commentators, especially regarding documentarism. Sven H. Rossel, for example, argues that the »breakthrough of politically motivated documentarism« in Sweden (and Denmark) in the 1960s and the 1970s should be viewed as a continuation of »the proletarian literature of the 1930s,«⁴⁶⁴ and Furuland argues that

461 Ibid.

462 BRANTLEY: 1996, 348.

463 KYLHAMMAR: 1994, II.

464 ROSSEL: 1997, 16.

Maja Ekelöf's and Marit Paulsen's »rapporter inifrån arbetarvärlden« (reports from inside the world of labor) continue a tradition within working-class literature going back to such older working-class writers as Maria Sandel and Moa Martinson.⁴⁶⁵ In the very first paragraph of her dissertation about Kjellgren, Gerd Kwart argues that the renewed interest in his work in the 1970s was a product of »det senaste decenniets intresse för dokumentärskildring och arbetardikt« (the interest during the latest decade in documentary literature and working-class writing).⁴⁶⁶ »I sin strävan att ge dokumentärskildringen en egen form för att däri skildra arbetets villkor och i sin envisa ambition att gestalta kollektivet« (In his aspiration to give documentary literature a form of its own, suited for the depiction of the conditions of labor, and in his stubborn ambition to represent the collective), Kwart continues, »är hans författarskap lika angeläget idag som under det 1930-tal då det kom till« (his works are as important to day as they were when they were created in the 1930s).⁴⁶⁷

Other commentators have, however, pointed out that this continuity has been obscured. In her presentation of Kjellgren in *Våra författare*, for example, the critic Agneta Pleijel claimed that many of the writers of report books in the 1960s did not see themselves as continuing any tradition from the 1930s and that it was, therefore, crucial for radical critics to promote awareness about this fact;⁴⁶⁸ a similar claim could also be made regarding the turn to modernism among Swedish working-class writers in the late 1960s and the 1970s.

In the 1930s, Swedish modernism was the object of aesthetic and political conflicts. Above all, Marxist critics such as Ture Nerman, Arnold Ljungdal, and Per Meurling criticized what they viewed as aestheticizing and hermetic tendencies among the young modernist writers and instead propagated that modernist techniques be used in the service of a radical class politics.⁴⁶⁹ One working-class writer who heeded this call was Lo-Johansson, who in his novels from the 1930s experimented with modernist forms in order to develop literary strategies for the representation of class conflict, for example, by using »polyfonisk« (polyphonic) composi-

465 FURULAND: 1977, 19.

466 KVART: 1979, 9.

467 Ibid.

468 PLEIJEL: 1974, 123.

469 See NILSSON: 2003, 245–255; PLEIJEL: 1972, 13–17.

tion for thematizing conflicting class interests and class perspectives.⁴⁷⁰ Lo-Johansson also experimented with various forms of *Verfremdung* as a means for revitalizing modernism's avant-garde ambition to unite life and art and to challenge the aestheticism that he viewed as the hallmark of bourgeois literature,⁴⁷¹ which indicates that his relationship with modernism was similar to that displayed by Palm in the 1960s and the 1970s. Like Palm, Lo-Johansson attacked modernism *from within* by appropriating its literary techniques, while rejecting its hermetic ideals.

This attempt to re-function modernist forms did, however, represent a road not taken in Swedish literature. Peter Luthersson has demonstrated that already when it was first introduced in Swedish literary discourse just before World War I, it was assumed that modernism »was about form and style, that it was directed towards the purely aesthetic.«⁴⁷² And the modernism that eventually became hegemonic in Swedish literature after World War II⁴⁷³ was indeed directed towards the aesthetic rather than the political. As Pleijel has pointed out, the triumph of this version of modernism – which aimed at a revolution »av livsformerna, av känslorna, men inte av de ekonomiska förhållandena« (of the forms of life, the feelings, but not the economic conditions) – blocked »en annan, tänkbar väg för svensk modernism« (another possible way for Swedish modernism),⁴⁷⁴ and thus, as Luthersson puts it, the modernism of *Fem unga* »never really became what it promised.«⁴⁷⁵

The rise to hegemony of this version of modernism in Swedish literature obscured the attempts by working-class writers in the 1930s to use modernist experimentation as a means of challenging bourgeois literature, and thus cut off the modernist working-class writers of the late 1960s and the 1970s from their predecessors in the tradition of working-class literature. A telling example of this is Lagerberg's claim that his use of modernist forms represents a break with the very tradition of working-class literature: »Under 70-talet fick jag en allt större aktning för arbetarlitteraturen« (In the 1970s my respect for working-class literature in-

470 NILSSON: 2003, 263–267.

471 See *ibid.*, 303–311.

472 LUTHERSSON: 2003, 33.

473 See HOLM: 1975, 246.

474 PLEIJEL: 1972, 16.

475 LUTHERSSON: 2003, 30.

creased), he said in an interview in the early 1990s, »[m]en i grunden är jag modernist« (but on a fundamental level I am a modernist).⁴⁷⁶ In academic research too, older Swedish working-class literature has often been described as embracing realism while rejecting modernism. One good example of this is Wright's argument that the working-class writers coming to the fore in Sweden during the 1930s represented »a continuation and an expansion of the realistic, socially aware vein of Swedish literature that has its origins in the Modern Breakthrough« and her characterization of their works as being »conservative« with respect to »style.«⁴⁷⁷ These working-class writers' »literary orientation,« Wright argues, was »traditional, hearkening back to the straightforward, chronological structure and omniscient third-person narrator or apparently guileless first-person storyteller of the nineteenth-century novel,« and »modernism« and formal experimentation were »conspicuously absent« from their works.⁴⁷⁸

In recent years, however, several scholars have criticized the assumption about the commitment to realism in Swedish working-class literature from the 1930s – which Lo-Johansson in a late essay described as a result of »tankelättja« (lazy thinking).⁴⁷⁹ The starting point for this critique was Ebba Witt-Brattström's highly influential study, *Moa Martinson: Skrift och drift i trettioalet* (Moa Martinson: Writing and Urge in the 1930s), in which Martinson is presented as a modernist writer.⁴⁸⁰ Thereafter, several scholars have reached similar conclusions in studies of some of the most important working-class writers from this decade, such as Rudolf Värnlund, Ivar Lo-Johansson, and Eyvind Johnson.⁴⁸¹ Thus, the »convenience of literary history«⁴⁸² to separate the modernist writers of the 1930s from the tradition of working-class literature has been abandoned.

This re-thinking of the relationship between modernism and the working-class literature of the 1930s has had a substantial impact also outside of academia. One example of this is that Lagerberg, who as late as in the early 1990s viewed modernism and working-class literature as more

476 LAGERBERG: 1992, 17.

477 WRIGHT: 1996a, 346–347.

478 Ibid., 347.

479 LO-JOHANSSON: 1988, 70.

480 WITT-BRATTSTRÖM: 1988.

481 MATTSSON: 1989; NILSSON: 2003; VULOVIĆ: 2009.

482 BRANTLEY: 1996, 348.

or less absolute opposites, now writes about the modernism of 1930s working-class literature as a matter of fact and argues that in the early 1930s both Eyvind Johnson and Ivar Lo-Johansson tried to develop a form of »social modernism« (social modernism).⁴⁸³ In the light of this, Lagerberg's own experimentation with modernist forms in the late 1960s and the 1970s appears less as a break with the tradition of working-class literature than as a continuation of aesthetic strategies developed within it.

The Limits of Ideology Critique

The New Left's ideology critique of bourgeois literature has contributed to the obscuring of the continuity between the attempts made by working-class writers in the late 1960s and the 1970s to challenge established literary forms and the experimentation with modernism in Swedish working-class literature of the 1930s. Melberg's highly influential reading of Ahlin's revolt against realism as an attempt to achieve a radical break with the aesthetic strategies developed in 1930s working-class literature, for example, clearly over-emphasized the commitment to (bourgeois) realism among older working-class writers, and thus contributed to establishing the idea about a gap between older and newer working-class literature on the level of literary form.

This obscuring of formal experimentation in radical literature from the 1930s is by no means unique for Sweden. As Valentine Cunningham has underlined, for example, any approach to »thirties writing« has to confront a »traditional knee-jerk division between modernism and the thirties,« which defines the decade as »a period only of Political art, of Documentary deviationism, a time of sad Realist cravings, of rampant anti-Formalism,« and »anti-Textualism.«⁴⁸⁴ Cunningham has, however, also demonstrated that this view is above all ideological and that it serves the purpose of making it possible to discard politically radical literature from the 1930s as a

historical blip or bypass on which writing got snagged and slowed down in the good long march of the twentieth century from modernism at the beginning to

⁴⁸³ LAGERBERG: 2003, 230–231. Brantley has also argued that in his autobiographical novels from the 1930s, Eyvind Johnson »brings modernist self-reflection and musical composition techniques to the genre of proletarian autobiography« (BRANTLEY: 1996, 350). Regarding the concept of social modernism, see NILSSON: 2003.

⁴⁸⁴ CUNNINGHAM: 1997, 5.

postmodernism at the end. This view sees the thirties as a very unfortunate, even inexplicable, parenthesis, and one which we can now [...] simply overlook as a species of shortsightedness, a deviant moment in a larger textualizing progress, involving [...] literary-critical errors we can only wonder at our immediate literary and critical fathers for indulging themselves in.⁴⁸⁵

By over-emphasizing the commitment among older Swedish working-class writers to bourgeois realism, the New Left may thus have contributed to discrediting the tradition of working-class literature in the site of national literature, which, in turn, may have made it more difficult to use this tradition to legitimize radical literary representations of class, as well as hindering working-class writers in the late 1960s and the 1970s from learning from the aesthetical-political strategies of challenging bourgeois literature developed in working-class literature.

This highlights a theoretical problem in the New Left's ideology critique of bourgeois literature, which has been pointed out by Kerstin Norén. According to her, the New Left's critique of the bourgeois institution was based on a problematic conceptualization of the relationship between the site of literature and other parts of the social totality. »Betonar man bara *enheten* i det litterära sammanhanget« (If one stresses only the *unity* in the sphere of literature), she writes,

missar man det obestriddliga faktum att litteraturen i den borgerliga epoken både vad gäller sina värderingar och sina värderingar är starkt splittrad [---]. [D]en borgerliga offentlighetens litterära del påverkas ju t.ex. av arbetarklassens erövring av offentliga positioner på olika fält i samhällslivet [---]. [D]et kulturella livet i det borgerliga samhället är genomsyrat av den klasskamp som där drives [...].

(one will miss the undeniable fact that in the bourgeois epoch, literature is, both regarding its values and its forms, very disharmonious [---]. [T]he literary sector of the bourgeois public sphere is affected, for example, by the working class's conquering of public positions in various fields of social life [---]. [T]he cultural life in bourgeois society is saturated by the class struggle waged there [...].)⁴⁸⁶

This critique has general relevance for Marxist literary criticism, but is perhaps especially important in relation to the ideology critique of the use by Swedish working-class writers of allegedly bourgeois forms formulated by the New Left. For, the argument, put forward by Per-Olof Mattsson, that in Sweden, bourgeois literature has never really been hegemonic, speaks against the assumption that the Swedish working-class literature

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ NORÉN: 1977, 23–24.

of the 1930s was assimilated into bourgeois literature. Drawing on Trotsky's »law of *combined development*,«⁴⁸⁷ Mattsson has argued that the breakthrough for bourgeois literature in Sweden came as late as in the 1910s and that its hegemony lasted only about a decade, after which began a radical modernization of Swedish literature led by writers from »de lägre klasserna« (the lower classes).⁴⁸⁸

Mattsson stresses that his claims are hypothetical and that the development of his argumentation into a solid theory necessitates further studies of »hur gruppen av arbetarförfattare moderniserade den svenska litteraturen« (*how* this group of working-class writers modernized Swedish literature) and of the specific »kombination av faktorer« (combination of factors) that »resulterade i arbetarförfattarnas dominans« (resulted in the dominance of working-class writers) in Swedish literature in the period 1925–1950.⁴⁸⁹ However, he also points out that the Swedish New Left's ideology critique of the bourgeois institution of literature can be subjected to the same critique since it has failed to take into account »särdragen i den svenska utvecklingen« (the distinctive features of the Swedish development) and, thus, has become »alltför allmän« (too general).⁴⁹⁰ Among these features are not only Sweden's economic and political backwardness and the resulting uneven development of Swedish society but also the very fact that working-class literature has played a more prominent role in Sweden than in other capitalist countries. For, not only is it reasonable to assume that this was made possible by the weakness of bourgeois literature, but it is just as reasonable to assume that this prominence has resulted in real changes within the Swedish site of literature.

Despite this shortcoming, the New Left's ideology critique of bourgeois literature also played a progressive role in the development of Swedish working-class literature in the late 1960s and the 1970s, above all through its drawing attention to questions about literary form and its promotion of literary experimentation. Even though the idea that older working-class literature was committed to bourgeois realist aesthetics may be a myth, its consequences, such as the understanding of this literature as representing a detour from the main current of twentieth century

487 TROTSKY: 1967, 23.

488 MATTSSON: 1995, 48. See also MATTSSON: 2013.

489 MATTSSON: 1995, 48. Emphasis in the original.

490 Ibid.

aesthetic progress, are culturally productive. By encouraging formal experimentation, the New Left's ideology critique of bourgeois literature thus probably contributed to giving working-class literature a higher status and stronger position in the site of national literature.

In West Germany, on the other hand, the New Left's radical ideology critique of bourgeois literature did not result in increased experimentation with literary forms among working-class writers. In the early seventies, Martin Walser claimed that the WLA represented the »wirkliche Avantgarde« (true avant-garde) in West-German literature.⁴⁹¹ This status is, however, one that exists only *in the site of literature*, and since the working-class writers in the WLA had the ambition to break with this site, they did not claim it.

This rejection of the avant-garde position within literature was probably one of the causes behind the fact that the aesthetic development in the WLA – despite the organization's explicit ambitions to challenge established, bourgeois, literature – eventually led to a privileging of »überlieferter oder gebräuchlicher Formen« (traditional and common forms), which in turn resulted in the production of literary works characterized by »Naivität und Simplizität« (naivety and simplicity).⁴⁹² The WLA's ambition to break with bourgeois literature thus (paradoxically) led to a commitment to a very traditional aesthetics, whereas the ambition within Swedish working-class literature from the late 1960s and the 1970s to stay within the realm of literature resulted in formal experimentation aiming to challenge bourgeois aesthetics.

491 WALSER: 1973, 125.

492 SAGARA: 1981, 294.

Chapter 4

Tradition and Speaking Position: Working-Class Literature and Globalized Capitalism

Even though the New Left had a massive impact on the intellectual climate in Sweden in the 1970s, this was also the decade in which the political right started gaining influence in both politics and culture. In 1976, a right-wing coalition won the general elections, and for the first time since 1932, the social democrats no longer held government in Sweden. The social democrats returned to power in 1982 (with support in parliament from the communist party), but the political climate in the 1980s was nevertheless very different from the radical 1970s. In culture too, the left was on the defensive in the 1980s, as can be seen in the decline of working-class literature during this decade. However, in the 1990s, the dominant ideals in the site of literature slowly started to become more favorable for working-class writers, and after the turn of the millennium, a revival of this literature set in. One of the latest high points in this revival is a trilogy of short poetic autobiographical prose narratives by Kristian Lundberg: *Yarden* (The Yard), from 2009; *Och allt ska vara kärlek* (And All Shall Be Love), from 2011; and *En hemstad: Berättelsen om att färdas genom klassmörkret* (A Hometown: The Story about Traveling Through the Darkness of Class), from 2013. Lundberg began his literary career in the early 1990s as a poet and has since then published more than 20 works: mainly poetry collections, but also some works in other genres, including crime novels. *Yarden* has, however, been his hitherto greatest critical and commercial success, and with this work, he also established his membership in the tradition of working-class literature.

Class in Post-Industrial and Multicultural Sweden

Yarden tells, in a self-reflexive and often highly poetic way, the story of a writer and critic of working-class background who, because of a tax debt, is forced to start working as a manual laborer at »Yarden« (The Yard), a transshipment hub for cars in the city of Malmö in southern Sweden. This story is interwoven with the first-person narrator's recollections of growing up in an environment marked by poverty, mental illness, and drug abuse. The narrative's two time planes are connected through the

insistence that both the narrator's childhood experiences and his experiences of contemporary labor are manifestations of his class belonging, as when he argues that his transformation from a writer to a manual laborer represents a return to his starting point⁴⁹³ and that his current situation is a consequence of his life-long »klasstillhörighet« (class affiliation).⁴⁹⁴

The representation of class in *Yarden* often focuses on rather concrete manifestations of class injustice, such as the bodily pain,⁴⁹⁵ poverty,⁴⁹⁶ and feelings of being powerless (both in the workplace and in life) and unable to control one's own destiny⁴⁹⁷ experienced by manual laborers in contemporary Sweden, or how those who grow up in the working class are marked for life and will never achieve what they strive to.⁴⁹⁸ In addition to this, the narrator invokes Marxist theories about class, for example, by claiming that being a worker means being reduced to a bearer of the commodity of labor power,⁴⁹⁹ and thus, being alienated from one's humanity.⁵⁰⁰

The most striking feature of Lundberg's representation of class is, however, its strong self-reflexivity. More than being a narrative about class, *Yarden* is a narrative about *the representation* of class.⁵⁰¹

One thing that makes the representation of class in *Yarden* self-reflexive is that it explicitly thematizes its relationship to dominant ideas about Sweden having become a society free from class antagonism. One such idea is the contemporary national self-understanding of Sweden as a multicultural society, which gives ethnic difference the status of a key code for understanding the social structure, thereby marginalizing the concept of class.⁵⁰² Another of these ideas is that that Sweden has become a post-industrial society in which the class antagonisms characteristic of industrial capitalism are no longer relevant.⁵⁰³

493 LUNDBERG: 2009, 52, 55, and 124.

494 *Ibid.*, 35.

495 *Ibid.*, 13.

496 *Ibid.*, 54.

497 *Ibid.*, 57 and 126.

498 *Ibid.*, 35.

499 *Ibid.*, 33 and 42.

500 *Ibid.*, 25, 50 and 119–121.

501 See NILSSON: 2011, 56; NILSSON: 2012: 58; NILSSON 2013: 28–29.

502 See NILSSON: 2010a, 55–60.

503 See *ibid.*, 60–65.

The city in which *Yarden* is set – Malmö, Sweden’s third largest city, situated across the Öresund strait from Copenhagen – is in many ways a perfect symbol for the multicultural and post-industrial Sweden. It used to be an important industrial town but is today going through a process of economic restructuring, in which the manufacturing industry is being replaced by higher education and by the high-tech and service industries. Malmö is also home to one of the largest immigrant populations in Sweden.

At a first glance, *Yarden* could very well be read as a story about the new multicultural Sweden: as a story about how ethnicity has become a key code for understanding contemporary society and how today class divisions follow ethnic lines. The class reality it describes is one in which most workers are immigrants, and the narrator also highlights that the fact that he is »svensk« (Swedish) makes him well favored in comparison with his immigrant workmates.⁵⁰⁴ Because of this, Åsa Arping has argued that ethnicity is one of the fundamental distinctions by means of which the narrator in *Yarden* constructs his identity:

Det är i relation till de papperslösa flyktingarna, de muslimska kollegorna och de filippinska besättningsmännen som det vita svenska, *malmöitiska*, kristna berättarjaget situerar sig.

(It is in relation to the undocumented migrants, the Muslim workmates, and the Philippine sailors that the white, Swedish, *Malmö-born*, Christian first-person narrator situates himself.)⁵⁰⁵

At the same time as he recognizes the importance of ethnicity in the contemporary world of labor, however, the narrator also tries to show how ethnic categories obscure experiences of class, not the least through the insistence that workers’ economic and social conditions create an underlying homogeneity that run counter to ethnic divisions. As Arping puts it: »Det gemensamma som skrivs fram är en delad maktlöshet på en ny arbetsmarknad« (The homogeneity that is written forth is a shared powerlessness on a new labor market). A good example of this is the following description of the narrator’s relationship to his immigrant workmates, in which ethnic divisions are ridiculed, and shared class experiences are described as a foundation for solidarity:

⁵⁰⁴ LUNDBERG: 2009, 69.

⁵⁰⁵ ARPING: 2011, 194. Emphasis in the original.

Här är det jag som är invandraren. Vi skämtar om det. Att jag kommer och tar deras jobb, att jag förstör marknaden för hederliga blattar. Arbetet i sig är så meningslöst och tungt att det är svårt att inte solidarisera sig med varandra. Vi är lika värda, talar samma språk, lever med samma trötthet och oro.

(Here, I'm the immigrant. We make jokes about that. That I take their jobs, destroying the market for honest wogs. The work is in itself so meaningless and hard that it is hard not to develop a feeling of solidarity with each other. We are of equal worth; speak the same language, live with the same fatigue and worries.)⁵⁰⁶

The critique in *Yarden* of the idea that Sweden has become a post-industrial society is expressed, for example, in the following passage, describing the narrator walking to his workplace:

Jag promenerar längs med vägen som går mellan Västra Hamnen och Mellersta Hamnen, passerar Turning Torso, skateboardramperna, svänger in genom bostadsområdet Dockan och kommer ut vid den lilla klaffbron. [...] Det är bara jag vaken i dessa kvarter. [...] Det är ett märkligt område; allt vilar på ett arbete som nu är osynliggjort. På andra sidan om klaffbron finns fortfarande delar av det nedlagda varvet kvar: hamnbassängerna. [...]

För bara en kort tid sedan gick säkert både min far och hans far före honom i just dessa kvarter. Min farfar arbetade på Kockums, precis som min far ett kort tag, och jag. I tredje generation; med arbetet nedärvt i kroppen. Malmö är en stad med fantomsmärtor.

Då var Malmö en annan slags stad. Området Västra Hamnen kallades för Sibirien; efter vad jag kan förstå fungerade det som ett slags avstjälpningsplats. Det finns en ironi i det.

(I'm strolling along the road between the Western Harbor and the Middle Harbor, passing the Turning Torso, the skateboard ramps, turning into and passing through the residential area The Dock, and exiting by the little bascule-bridge. [...] I'm the only one awake in this neighborhood. [...] It is a strange neighborhood; everything rests on labor that is now made invisible. On the other side of the bascule-bridge you still see parts of the shut-down shipyard; the docks. [...])

506 LUNDBERG: 2009, 98. A similar critique was formulated by Palm in *Ett år på LM*: »Enbart det faktum att en tredjedel av LM:s arbetsstyrka idag består av invandrare från ett tiotal olika länder borgar för en språklig och utseendemässig mångfald som svårligen låter sig fogas in i den traditionella bilden av svensk industriarbetarklass. Mitt intryck är också att invandrarna på LM i första hand igenkänns som utlänningar av sina svenska arbetskamrater och först i andra hand som arbetare. [...] Det särpräglade utseendet och talet skymmer så att säga klasstillhörigheten« (Alone the fact that today, one third of the work force at LM is made up of immigrants from some ten different countries guarantees a linguistic diversity, and a diversity in appearance, that is not easily fitted into the traditional image of the Swedish industrial working class. It is also my impression that the immigrants at LM are primarily recognized as foreigners by their Swedish workmates, and only secondarily as workers. [...] The distinctive look and speech so to speak obscures the class belonging (PALM: 1972, 93).

Only a short time ago both my father and my grandfather probably walked around here. My grandfather worked at the shipyard, as did my father for a short while, and I. The third generation; with labor handed down in the body. Malmö is a city suffering from phantom pain.

Then, Malmö was a different kind of city. The Western Harbor was called Siberia; as far as I understand, it was used as a sort of dump. Now it's an exclusive residential area. There's irony in that.)⁵⁰⁷

The Western Harbor used to be the heart of industrial Malmö, home to the Kockums shipyard, which in the 1950s and 1960s was one of the largest in the world, and which remained until it closed in the late 1980s one of the biggest workplaces in Malmö. Today the Western Harbor is an exclusive residential area, whose skyline is dominated by Santiago Calatrava's skyscraper Turning Torso. It also harbors Malmö University, as well as cafés and restaurants, and IT-companies and other businesses associated with the new economy. Thus, it is hardly surprising that it has become a symbol for the new, post-industrial Malmö.⁵⁰⁸

The representation of class in *Yarden* is on a fundamental level based on an idea about continuity. This continuity is established not least through the narrator's insistence that his contemporary experiences of manual labor and his experiences of growing up in poverty are both expressive of his class belonging. In the description of the Western Harbor, the continuity between present and past is also emphasized in the formulation about labor being »nedärvt« (handed down) to the narrator from his ancestors. Nevertheless, the narrator also recognizes that Malmö has changed, that it is a different kind of city now than it was only a little while ago. Thus, he does not deny the reality of post-industrialism. However, at the same time, he highlights that this post-industrial Malmö, for which the Western Harbor is a symbol, fulfills an ideological function by obscuring labor.

When the narrator walks to work through the Western Harbor, the people living there are all asleep. Thus, no one sees him. And this means that the work he performs – the surplus labor making possible the very existence of exclusive residential areas, posh restaurants, public skateboard ramps, and the university – is made invisible.

That the idea about ›the new Malmö‹ makes invisible certain aspects of contemporary class reality is also emphasized in the following passage,

⁵⁰⁷ LUNDBERG: 2009, 34.

⁵⁰⁸ See NILSSON: 2010b, 4–7.

where the narrator describes the city's transformation as an amnesic process, which marginalizes many of its inhabitants:

Staden minns inte längre. Den minns inte oss; rivningshusen vid Värnhemstorget, knarkarkvartarna i Rörsjöstaden och på Gamla Väster, hororna och Café Florida. Allt ska förändras. Malmö ska bli en annan slags stad. En stad som inte längre rymmer alla sina invånare. [...] Vi säger det aldrig rätt ut, men vi visar det med förfärande tydlighet: det finns ingen plats åt er här. Ni är spöken, gengångare.

(The city no longer remembers. It doesn't remember us; the buildings at Värnhemstorget waiting to be demolished, the shooting galleries in Rörsjöstaden and in Gamla Väster, the hookers and Café Florida. Everything will change. Malmö will be a different kind of city. A city that doesn't hold all its inhabitants. [...] We never say it straight out, but we show it with horrifying clarity: there is no place for you here. You are ghosts, zombies.)⁵⁰⁹

The representation of class in *Yarden* is not only constructed in dialogue with dominant ideas about contemporary Swedish society but also positions itself in relation to other representations (or the lack of such) of class.

When returning to the world of manual labor, the narrator realizes that it is no longer the same as it was when he was younger:

[U]nder de femton år som förflutit sedan jag senast arbetade med kroppen har förutsättningarna förändrats avsevärt. Om jag i min ungdom kunde studsas fram och tillbaka som en flipperkula, på jakt efter jobb som alltid infann sig, så var jag nu som en rund boll som försökte trycka sig igenom ett fyrkantigt hål. Det fanns ingen plats för mig; jag var som en livstidsfånge som plötsligt släppts ur sin cell och nu inte längre kunde tolka omvärlden.

(During the fifteen years that have passed since I last worked with my body, the conditions have changed considerably. If, in my youth, I could bounce back and forth like a pinball in search for jobs that always materialized, I was now like a ball trying to squeeze through a square opening. There was no place for me; I was like a prisoner for life, who had suddenly been released from his cell and now no longer could interpret the world.)⁵¹⁰

The narrator's inability to understand the world of labor is not only a result of it having changed but also of its consequent misrepresentation in the public sphere. »Skillnaden« (The difference), he argues, »mellan det som pågår på ytan – kultursidor, debattartiklar, motioner, insändare – och det som sker i underjorden är gigantisk. Det är en klyfta som i det närmaste är ogripbar« (between what's happening on the surface – cultural

⁵⁰⁹ LUNDBERG: 2009, 61–62.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 85–86.

pages in newspapers, op-eds, motions, letters to the editor – and what’s going on in the underworld is gigantic. It is a cleft that’s almost unfathomable).⁵¹¹ The class reality encountered by the narrator upon his return to the world of manual labor is thus described as consisting both of real changes and of cultural processes misrepresenting or obscuring this reality.

A similar argument is made about poverty. Poverty, the narrator argues, is different now from when he was young. Then, there was welfare-state politics that could sometimes alleviate its consequences: »Det fanns en bostadspolitik. Det fanns en socialpolitik. Den fungerade inte alltid, men tillräckligt ofta« (There was housing policy. There was social policy. It didn’t always work, but often enough it did).⁵¹² However, poverty is not just different from what it used to be before the dismantling of reformist welfare-state politics. It is also, like labor, being obscured and misrepresented in the public sphere. Poverty, the narrator claims, is a phenomenon defined by »dem som har tolkningsföreträde« (those who have preferential right of interpretation).⁵¹³ And they use this right to make the poor invisible:

[D]e osynliggjorda och fattiga skymtar man bara till som hastigast, sent på natten, tidigt på morgonen, i rörelse – ständigt i rörelse mellan sina arbeten. Ibland kan jag se dem skymta förbi i en artikel, ett ledaruppslag, en blogg – lika levande som fjärilar bakom glas och ram, en främmande art som man kan studera på avstånd [...].

(Those who are poor and made invisible are only glimpsed in passing, late at night, early in the morning, in movement – constantly in movement between their jobs. Sometimes I can catch a glimpse of them in an article, an editorial, a blog – as alive as butterflies behind glass and within a frame, an alien species that can be studied at a distance [...].)⁵¹⁴

That the narrator’s experiences of class are being made invisible in the public sphere is also highlighted in the following passage:

Under nätterna är drömmarna allt oftare repris. Jag hetsas, jagas. Jag skall genomföra en handling, som att tvätta en bil på tid, och misslyckas. Jag skall packa C-blocket och bilarna jag pressar samman kommer för nära varandra; skadar stötfångarna. Absurda drömmar. Och ändå inte. De berättar om mitt liv. En del av mitt liv; den del som nu ligger i radioskugga. Månens baksida.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 51–52.

⁵¹² Ibid., 81.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 54.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 55.

(During the nights, the dreams are more and more often reruns. I am rushed, hunted. I have to carry something out, like washing a car on time, and I fail. I have to pack the C-block, and the cars that I press together end up too close to each other; their bumpers are damaged. Absurd dreams. But then again not. They tell of my life. A part of my life; the part that currently lies in radio shadow. The back side of the moon.)⁵¹⁵

The class aspects of the narrator's life are thus so marginalized that it is almost impossible to comprehend them.

Tradition and ambivalence

The critique in *Yarden* of the misrepresentation and obscuring of the narrator's experiences of class includes a critique of literature.

Often the narrator describes the world of labor and poverty as being antithetical to the world of literature, as in the following passage:

Jag är en skrivande människa. Under många år var jag tyst. Att skriva och läsa var sådant som andra gjorde. Att arbeta med byggnadsställningar och samtidigt förundra sig över rytmiken i Stagnelius dikter; hänföras över Almqvists var-samma handlag med nyanserna – nej, det gick då verkligen inte an.

(I am a writing person. For many years, I was silent. Reading and writing was for others. To work with scaffolding and at the same time be astonished by the rhythm of Stagnelius' poetry; exalted by Almqvist's gentle handling of nuances – no that certainly wouldn't do.)⁵¹⁶

This view makes the narrator question whether it is at all possible to use literature as a means for describing and criticizing contemporary class reality, as in the following formulation:

Helvetet är också vi.

Låter det inte bra att läsa det? Tryggt och provocerande på ett lugnt och säkert vis. En annan sak är att genomleva helvetet.

(Hell is also we.

Doesn't it sound reassuring to read that? Comforting and provocative in a calm and safe way. Another thing is to live through hell).⁵¹⁷

By playing with Sartre's famous phrase from *Huis Clos* (published in English as *No Exit*) – »L'enfer, c'est les autres« (Hell is other people) – the narrator underlines the ›literariness‹ of his own discourse. However,

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 30. Erik Johan Stagnelius (1793–1823) and Carl Jonas Love Almqvist (1793–1866) are two of the most important writers in Swedish nineteenth-century literature.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 16–17.

at the same time, he questions the possibility of using literature for describing his experiences. Literature, he argues, is safe, whereas life is not. To read about hell is comforting; to live through hell is a different thing altogether. A similar questioning of whether or not literature can be used to describe the narrator's class experiences is also expressed in his rhetorical question if it is not ridiculous for a middle-aged poet such as himself to use terms like »klasskamp« (class struggle).⁵¹⁸

In *Yarden*, literature and class are thus described as being more or less incompatible phenomena. This, of course, constitutes a serious problem for the narrator's ambition to tell the story about his experiences of Swedish class society, and this problem is often explicitly thematized in his narrative, for example, in the following passages:

Ett tag tänkte jag att jag skulle skriva en diktrad varje dag och att jag vid årets slut skulle ha ett helt arbetsår sammanfattat, kristalliskt klart, som ett enda vasst saltkorn.

En diktcykel som fångade upp arbetets essens; som kunde härbärgera denna containerkänsla som bereder sig plats inom mig.

Så blev det nu inte.

Vad som hände istället?

Jag vet inte.

(For a while I thought that I would write a line of poetry every day and that by the end of the year, I would have a summary of a whole work year, clear as crystal, like a single sharp grain of salt.

A cycle of poetry, capturing the essence of work; that could harbor this container feeling that spreads within me.

It didn't turn out that way.

What happened instead?

I don't know.)⁵¹⁹

Jag skriver varje morgon. Och hur gärna jag än försöker så lyckas jag inte fånga in det jag vill säga, det jag måste säga: vi monteras bort, förs undan, ungefär som när man stryker rent en bordsskiva och låter smulorna ramla ner på golvet, inte bryr man sig om smulorna där, bara skivan är ren.

(I write every morning. And however willingly I try, I do not succeed in capturing what I want to say, what I have to say: we are being dismantled, taken away, like when you wipe off a table top and let the crumbs fall down on the floor, then you don't care about the crumbs down there, as long as the table top is clean.)⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 22.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 30–31.

Sometimes, the narrator even contemplates leaving literature altogether, as in the following passage:

Och efter ett par månader i systemet orkar jag inte längre tänka på att jag skall sammanfatta mina erfarenheter; att jag ska skriva om det som måste uttalas.

Allt oftare tänker jag istället att svaret på den fråga som makten aldrig ställer till oss blir att sluta vända den andra kinden till; att istället ta upp stenen från marken och kasta den, hårt och skoningslöst.

(And, after a few months within the system, I no longer have the strength to think about having to summarize my experiences; having to write about what needs to be verbalized.

More and more often, I think instead that the answer to the question never posed to us by the power is to stop turning the other cheek; to instead pick up the stone from the ground and to throw it, hard and merciless.)⁵²¹

The narrator does not, however, reject literature as such. »Det är inte enkelt« (It is not easy), he says about his attempts to put his story to paper, but he also adds: »Det är inte heller de enkla berättelserna som förtjänar att bli nedtecknade« (But it is not the simple stories that deserve being written down).⁵²²

Instead of rejecting literature, the narrator in *Yarden* rejects dominant literary ideals. One example of this can be found in the following description of his relationship to current literary debates:

På kultursidan i den lokala dagstidningen kan jag läsa att det pågår en konflikt, en litterär strid, mellan anhängarna av romantiska förbundet och en mer språk-orienterad grupp. Jag lever i en mörk brunn, i botten av denna brunn står jag och tittar upp: moln, stjärnor, avlägsna röster. Jag tänker att jag nu är mer människa än vad jag var tidigare – att den dikt som inte är ett trovärdigt vittnesbörd om våra förhållanden bara är ett meningslöst mummel.

(On the culture page in the local newspaper, I can read that a conflict is going on, a literary battle, between the supporters of the romanticist league and a more language-oriented group. I live in a dark well, I stand at the bottom of this well, looking up: clouds, stars, distant voices. I think that now I am more of a human being than I was before – that poetry that is not a credible testimony about our conditions is just a meaningless mumbles.)⁵²³

The position from which the narrator criticizes the literati battling on the cultural pages and literature that does not give testimony about »våra förhållanden« (our conditions) is a low one: the bottom of a well. That

⁵²¹ Ibid., 53.

⁵²² Ibid., 21.

⁵²³ Ibid., 94.

this symbolizes the working-class writer's position in relation to ›Literature‹ (or that it is legitimized through the insistence that it is analogous with the position occupied by the working-class writer) is hinted at in the narrator's many allusions to older working-class literature. Several times, for example, he relates having read classic Swedish working-class writers, such as Ivar Lo-Johansson. When dropping out of school at the age of twelve, he created his » eget universitet« (own university), reading (among other things) Lo-Johansson and » hela statarlitteraturen« (the entire statar literature), and after running away from a mental institution at the age of twenty-two, he again reads the » statarberättarna« (statare writers).⁵²⁴

The narrator also admits to having stolen books (including works of Lo-Johansson) when he was working at a factory at the age of fifteen.⁵²⁵ This resembles both Lo-Johansson's claim in an autobiographical essay that he has stolen books⁵²⁶ and an anecdote, told in an account of his encounter with literature, about how he, at the age of fourteen, stole money from his father and spent it on books.⁵²⁷

These allusions to older working-class literature invite a placing of *Yarden* and its author in the tradition of Swedish working-class literature; the same can be said about the similarities concerning themes and motifs between *Yarden* and other works within this tradition. The narrator's invocations of a Marxist critique of capitalist industrial labor, for example, establishes likeness with the works of older working-class writ-

524 Ibid., 79 and 123. The statare were » a category of nonlandowning agricultural laborers [...] who were paid primarily in kind« and hired for a year at the time and who constituted » the most impoverished and oppressed group among the rural proletariat« (WRIGHT: 1996a, 339). This type of employment existed in Sweden until 1945, and its abolishment is generally viewed as a symbol for the inclusion of the rural proletariat in the welfare state. Several of the most important working-class writers from the 1930s came from the statare class, and three of them – Ivar Lo-Johansson, Moa Martinson, and Jan Fridegård – are sometimes referred to as › the statare school‹ because their breakthrough novels, which were all published in 1933, were autobiographical accounts of their childhood experiences in this class. The narrator's formulation about creating his own university could be read as an allusion to the concept of the » autodidakt« (autodidact), which, in Sweden, has often been used as a synonym to that of the working-class writer (see NILSSON: 2006a, 16). It could, of course, also be an allusion to Maxim Gorky's *My Universities*. Gorky's works were an important source of inspiration for many Swedish working-class writers (see FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 218), including the statare writers Ivar Lo-Johansson and Jan Fridegård (see ibid., 199 and 207), as well as Folke Fridell (see ibid., 557).

525 LUNDBERG: 2009, 120.

526 LO-JOHANSSON: 1932, 205.

527 LO-JOHANSSON: 1943, 117.

ers such as Fridell and Palm. His critique of how the understanding of Sweden as a post-industrial and multicultural society obscures questions about class has several similarities with the critique put forward in the two novels with which the latest revival of working-class literature commenced, namely, Susanna Alakoski's *Svinalängorna* (The Rows of Pig Houses), from 2006, and Åsa Linderborg's *Mig äger ingen* (I am Owned by No One), from 2007.⁵²⁸ Its dark picture of present-day labor resembles that found in works by such contemporary working-class writers as Jenny Wrangborg, Emil Boss, and Johan Jönson, as well as in works by such older working-class writers as Fridell and Salomonson. It is thus hardly surprising that several academic critics have already placed Lundberg's latest works in the tradition of working-class literature. Anna Williams argues, for example, that Lundberg writes about contemporary reality in dialogue with older working-class text and thus enters into a tradition of working-class literature going back to the inter-war period.⁵²⁹

Sometimes, however, Lundberg has distanced himself from the tradition of working-class literature. One example of this can be found in an article published in April 2011, in which he claims that he has never referred to himself as a working-class writer and that the concept lacks »substans« (substance).⁵³⁰ At other times, however, he has expressed a more positive view of the epithets working-class literature and working-class writer, and in 2011 he became a member of Föreningen Arbetarskrivare (The Association for Working-Class Writers), an association that organizes working-class writers and promotes working-class literature.

Lundberg's relationship to working-class literature is thus best described as one characterized by ambivalence, and this is also the best way to describe the narrator's relationship to working-class literature in *Yarden*. At the same time as he displays intimacy with some working-class writers – especially Ivar Lo-Johansson and the other »statäre writers« – he distances himself from others. The clearest example of the latter attitude can be found in the following passage:

⁵²⁸ See NILSSON: 2010a, 160–170 and 188–192.

⁵²⁹ WILLIAMS: 2011, 18. In a forthcoming work, Williams compares the story in *Yarden* about the narrator's return to the world of manual labor to the one told by Vilhelm Moberg in his autobiographical novels from the 1930s. Moberg was one of the most important representatives of Swedish working-class literature during this decade (see WILLIAMS: in press).

⁵³⁰ LUNDBERG: 2011a.

[E]n lokal författare som för tjugo år sedan arbetade i hamnen fotograferas vid det nerrasade lagerhuset. Jag läser intervjun med honom i tidningen senare; han talar nostalgiskt, talar med värme om alla kufar och särartsmänniskor som befolkade hamnen. Jag tänker: jag pissar på det.

(A local writer, who worked in the harbor twenty years ago, is being photographed next to the collapsed warehouse. Later, I read the interview in the newspaper; he talks nostalgically, talks with warmth about all the original and peculiar people that used to populate the harbor. I think: I piss on that.)⁵³¹

The local writer in question is Fredrik Ekelund, who in 1984 published *Stuv Malmö, kom!* (Malmö Stevedoring, Come In!), which is considered to be one of the most important Swedish working-class novels from the 1980s.⁵³² What the narrator in *Yarden* criticizes Ekelund for is that his view of manual labor is nostalgic and that he does not address the injustices characteristic of *contemporary* class reality. This critique is also formulated explicitly in an article in which Lundberg argues that Ekelund writes about »ett Malmö som redan har varit – som redan har inträffat« (a Malmö that has already been – that has already happened), and that he does so from a »medelklassperspektiv« (middle-class perspective).⁵³³

Besides the critique of Ekelund's alleged nostalgia, the narrator in *Yarden* also seems to be skeptical of the literary forms employed by working-class writers. A good example of this can be found in his skepticism regarding the possibility of using a term like »klasskamp« (class struggle) because it presupposes that »klasserna skulle vara definierade« (the classes are already defined), that they are »tydliga« (distinct).⁵³⁴ The narrator thus distances himself from an aesthetics that views literature as a means of depicting an already known reality. That this could be read as an attack on the realistic narrative mode often associated with Swedish working-class literature finds support in Lundberg's insistence in an article published in the Swedish Trade Union Confederation's newspaper, *LO-Tidningen*, that it is necessary to move away from an understanding of working-class literature as »realistiska romaner med sociala övertoner« (realistic novels with social overtones).⁵³⁵

531 LUNDBERG: 2009, 76.

532 Ekelund's status as a working-class writer is indicated by the fact that he receives a fair amount of attention in Furuland's survey of Swedish working-class literature (FURULAND and SVEDJEDAL: 2006, 354, 361–62, 373 and 427).

533 LUNDBERG: 2012.

534 LUNDBERG: 2009, 52.

535 LUNDBERG: 2011b. In 2012, *LO-Tidningen* changed its name to *Arbetet* (Work).

This ambivalence towards the tradition of working-class literature resembles the one expressed by Fridell, Palm, and other older working-class writers. Like Fridell, Lundberg criticizes older working-class literature for failing to address contemporary class reality, and like Palm, he critiques its (alleged) commitment to realism. Thus, it is not surprising that Lundberg – again, like Fridell and Palm – calls for the renewal of the tradition of working-class literature. This is clearly formulated in a public correspondence with the critic Crister Enander, where Lundberg argues for a renewal of working-class literature that would also be a return to »källorna« (the sources) of this tradition:

Jag talar om en radikalitet som rymmer klass, etnicitet och kön. Jag talar om en arbetarlitteratur med existentiella förtecken. Jag tror att den skrivs, är övertygad om att så sker, men också att den är osynliggjord. Jag tror att det är dags att vässa sina vapen och gå ut i strid.

(I'm talking about a radicalism that incorporates class, ethnicity and gender. I'm talking about a working-class literature with an existential signature. I think that it is being written, I am convinced that it is, but also that it is being made invisible. I think it is time to sharpen one's weapons and go to battle.)⁵³⁶

Lundberg also calls for a renewal of working-class literature in an article in the Finnish newspaper *Vasabladet*. Here he celebrates older working-class literature, and argues that the ideals embodied in it are missing in contemporary literature: »Tänk Ivar Lo-Johansson. Tänk arbetarlitteraturens vrede. Oförsonlighet. Vem är arg idag? Vem skriver ›hatets sånger‹?« (Think Ivar Lo-Johansson. Think the rage of working-class literature. Un-forgivingness. Who is angry today? Who writes »The Songs of Hatred«?).⁵³⁷ In order to revive these ideals, Lundberg argues, working class literature needs to be innovated through a »nyorientering« (new orientation), which at the same time represents a return to »källorna« (the sources) of the tradition.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁶ ENANDER and LUNDBERG: 2013, 42.

⁵³⁷ LUNDBERG: 2011c. *Hatets sånger* (The Songs of Hatred) is a poetry collection published by the working-class writer Leon Larson in 1906.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

Experience and Representation

Yarden can be seen as an attempt to innovate Swedish working-class literature by engaging the new class reality of post-industrial and multicultural Sweden. Lundberg's self-reflexive and highly poetic prose can also be seen as an attempt to break with the (alleged) dominance of realism in the tradition of working-class literature. However, since self-reflexivity is not a new phenomenon in Swedish working-class literature – but rather one of its characteristic features – this attempt at renewal could just as well be understood as an expression of conformity with tradition, as could the very insistence on the necessity to innovate it.

Another feature of *Yarden* that could be seen as a continuing of an important tendency within Swedish working-class literature is its discussion of the relationship between personal experience and literary representation.

Historically, Swedish working-class literature has often been understood to be a literature *expressing personal experiences of working-class life*. A good illustration of this can be found in the first major debate about working-class literature in the national site of literature, which followed the publication in 1921 of a textbook, written by Richard Steffen, in which »proletärdiktningen« (proletarian writing) was described as one of the most important contributions in recent years to modern Swedish literature.⁵³⁹ For Steffen, what made working-class literature interesting was, above all, that it gave readers authentic, first-hand reports from working-class life by writers who had themselves, at least for some time, lived this life.⁵⁴⁰

This understanding of working-class literature was also the dominant one both during the first breakthrough for working-class literature early in the twentieth century and during the golden age for working-class literature in the 1930s.⁵⁴¹

One important consequence of this understanding of working-class literature has been that during periods in which this literature had a strong position in the site of literature, working-class identity and membership in the working class became consecrated as symbolic capital in the

⁵³⁹ STEFFEN: 1921, 7.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ See NILSSON: 2006a, 53 and 69.

field of literary production, and this, in turn, made the affirmation of, or an active investment in, a proletarian identity a potentially successful strategy in this field.⁵⁴² Thus, it is hardly surprising that Swedish working-class writers emphasized their working-class backgrounds, both during the first years of the twentieth century and during the 1930s.⁵⁴³ One good example of this, from the latter period in question, can be found in the anthology *Ansikten* (Faces), from 1932, to which many of the working-class writers of the 1930s contributed with autobiographical essays. Already in the foreword, it is argued that what unites the writers represented in *Ansikten* are the »livsbetingelser« (living conditions) constituting the starting point for their road to literature, and most of the essays focus on the writers' personal experiences of working-class life.⁵⁴⁴ Other examples are the fact that the more or less autobiographical proletarian *Bildungsroman* became the dominant genre in Swedish working-class literature in the 1930s or various programmatic statements by working-class writers, such as Ivar Lo-Johansson's claim in the article »Statarskolan i litteraturen« (The Statare School in Literature) that »förstahandserfarenhet« (first-hand experience) is a necessary prerequisite for realism and that it has, therefore, been impossible for bourgeois writers to produce literature about the working-class.⁵⁴⁵

The insistence on personal experience of working-class life as an essential feature of working-class literature also plays an important role in the calls for its renewal after World War II. For example, Fridell argues that the recognition of working-class literature as a central strand in modern Swedish literature, and the success enjoyed by many writers of working-class background, has had as a result that »f.d. proletärförfattare« (former working-class writers) have moved into »en annan miljö« (a different environment) and that »avståndet mellan individuell beroendeställning och diktarinlevelse har förstorats« (the distance between individual subordination and artistic feeling has increased).⁵⁴⁶ A similar critique of the working-class writers of the 1930s as having no personal experience of contemporary working-class life – and, thus, no longer being

542 See NILSSON: 2010a, 46–47.

543 See NILSSON: 2006a, 54 and 69–70.

544 MÅNSSON et.al: 1932, 5.

545 LO-JOHANSSON: 1946, 180.

546 FRIDELL: 1970, 25.

genuine working-class writers – also resonates in Salomonson's claim in the late 1950s that these writers were »fångna i sin egen ungdom« (trapped in their own youth).⁵⁴⁷

In *Grottorna*, Salomonson also thematizes the idea that the representation of working-class life requires personal experience. Early in the novel, its protagonist, Ambjörn, is summoned by the branch manager at the mine where he is about to start working. The reason for this is that the manager has learned that Ambjörn has been a journalist and thus wants to make sure that he has not come to the mine with the ambition to write a »skandalartikel« (scandalizing article).⁵⁴⁸ That this fear of journalism is justified is made clear later in the novel, when a reportage criticizing the mining company's »metoder att förlytta silikosskadade arbetare mot deras vilja« (methods for deporting, against their will, workers suffering from silicosis) is published.⁵⁴⁹ Given this celebration of the reportage as a means for cultural class struggle – as well as the fact that Salomonson himself had a background in journalism, and that prior to the publication of *Grottorna*, he did write a series of reportages about the events described in the novel⁵⁵⁰ – one would expect the aesthetics in *Grottorna* to be influenced by this genre. However, even though it has been argued that *Grottorna* »hade det journalistiska reportage som modell« (was modeled on the journalistic reportage),⁵⁵¹ or even that parts of it could be characterized as »regelrätt reportage« (regular reportage),⁵⁵² it is primarily on the level of content that Salomonson engages with journalistic forms. And here, above all, it is *the limits* of journalism that are thematized; this thematization is centered on the description of a journalist who has been commissioned by the mining company to launch a counter attack against the »skandalartikel« (scandalizing article) criticizing the deportation of the miners.⁵⁵³ That this is a tricky endeavor is emphasized in the following scene, describing the journalist visiting a workshop, accompanied by the chairman of the local union:

547 SALOMONSON: 1969, 2.

548 SALOMONSON: 1956, 12.

549 Ibid., 110.

550 See JOHANSSON: 2013, 56.

551 JOHANSSON: 2011, 148.

552 JOHANSSON: 2013, 62.

553 SALOMONSON: 1956, 110.

De närmade sig verkstadsbyggnaden. En rad sotiga fönster gapade mot den öppna planen. Dörren i mitten stod på vid gavel för hettans skull. Och just i dörröppningen kastade en skärbrännare ifrån sig en skur av gnistor. Journalisten stannade tveksamt, men ordföranden drog honom beslutsamt med sig; gnistorna haglade över deras kläder. Efter det starka solskenet verkade lokalen nermörk. De elektriska dagsljuslamporna förmådde bara delvis upplysa de svarta ytorna. Men efter en stund vande sig ögonen vid skumrasket. Journalisten såg sig nyfiket omkring. Han bländades ögonblickligen av en elsvets intensiva blixtar.

– Titta inte dit, sade ordföranden.

Journalisten tog några bilder av ett par män som visades honom.

(They approached the workshop. A row of soot-smeared windows gaped at the open plane. The door in the middle was wide open because of the heat. And a cutting blowpipe threw a shower of sparks right in the door opening. The journalist halted hesitantly, but the chairman resolutely pulled him along; the sparks hailed over their clothes. Coming from the bright sunlight, the premises seemed pitch black. The electric daylight-lamps only managed to light up the black surfaces partially. But after a while the eyes got used to the darkness.⁵⁵⁴ The journalist looked around curiously. He was immediately blinded by the intense flashing of an electric welding set.

– Don't look in that direction, the chairman said.

The journalist took a couple of pictures of some men that were shown to him.)⁵⁵⁵

The journalist is a stranger in the world of manual labor. Therefore, he cannot *see* it, but has to rely on what he *is shown*. That this is to be understood as the very antithesis of Salomonson's own narrative is underlined in his foreword to the 1980 edition of *Grottorna*, where it is stressed that the novel is based on his personal experiences as a mineworker.⁵⁵⁶

The idea that working-class literature be a literature thematizing first-hand experiences of working-class life has often led to the exclusion from the tradition of working-class literature of writers of non-proletarian background.⁵⁵⁷ Therefore, it is not self-evident, for example, that Palm, who is an academic and the son of a rural dean, should be viewed as belonging to this tradition. This is probably the reason why questions about the relationship between personal experience and the representation of working-class life receives a fair amount of attention in the *LM-Books*. On the one hand, Palm argues (already on the very first page of *Ett år på*

554 The Swedish word for »darkness« used in this passage, (»skumrask«) connotes criminal activities.

555 Ibid., 113.

556 SALOMONSON: 1980, 3.

557 See NILSSON: 2006a, 21.

LM) that he is no mere visitor who has taken a job as a manual laborer in order to write about it:

Jag började inte jobba på LM för att samla material till en bok utan för att ha något att göra och samtidigt få hyran betald under en period av ihållande skrivkramp och politisk baksmälla. Jag kunde för all del ha lagt in mig på psyket eller utverkat ett resestipendium – författare kan göra sådant – men jag föredrog att gå ut i produktionen istället. Först efter ett halvårs knegande på LM hade jag piggnat till så pass att tanken på en bok lät sig födas.

(I did not start working at LM in order to collect material for a book, but to have something to do, and at the same time be able to pay the rent, during a period of persistent writer's block and political hangover. I could, by all means, have committed myself to a psychiatric institution or procured a traveling grant – writers can do such things – but I preferred to go out into production. Only after half a year of plodding at LM had I perked up enough for the idea about a book to be born.)⁵⁵⁸

Palm also stresses that by working at LM, he has taken the step from »att uppleva en samhällsklass utifrån till att, åtminstone för en tid, dela dess villkor« (experiencing a social class from the outside to, at least for a time, sharing its conditions).⁵⁵⁹ On the other hand, however, he also argues that the fact that he has other means for making a living than industrial work has made him a guest in the world of industrial labor:

Jag gästade bara LM, som en reggubbe som gått vilse. När som helst kunde jag återvända till mitt vanliga skrivarbete [...] – och den som hela tiden har en ljusare framtid i bakfickan kan så att säga *kosta på sig* en mera positiv arbetsupplevelse än den som har LM som enda framtid.

(I was only visiting LM, like a re-conscripted soldier who has gone lost. At any time, I could return to my usual writing job [...] – and he who always carries a brighter future in his back pocket can, so to speak, *afford* to have a more positive experience of work than he for whom LM is the only possible future.)⁵⁶⁰

In addition to this, Palm also claims that »varje industriskildring« (any description of industrial labor) that does not in some way give voice to the worker's »kunskap« (knowledge) and his or her »erfarenhet« (experience) – especially »den *långvariga* erfarenheten av industriarbete« (the *protracted* experience of industrial labor) and »den kunskap om människans utsatthet« (the knowledge about human disprivilege) emanating from this experience – is »dömd att bli ytlig« (doomed to be superficial).⁵⁶¹

558 PALM: 1972a, 5.

559 Ibid., 85.

560 Ibid., 66.

561 PALM: 1974, 105. Emphasis in the original.

However, at the same time, Palm's modernist aesthetics could be seen as containing an implicit critique of the insistence on personal experience as a prerequisite for the representation of the working class. One example of this is that his theory about how rhetorical fantasy can make the well-known appear in new light emphasizes the need of distancing oneself from the reality being represented and thus runs counter to the privileging of intimacy and proximity underpinning the idea that the working-class can only be represented from within.

This question about the relationship between personal experience and representation is thematized in *Yarden*, for example, in the narrator's insistence that he is no mere visitor to the working-class reality he describes:

Under knappt ett år har jag försörjt mig som timanställd. Daglönare. [...] Jag söker mig inte tillbaka till arbetet för att jag tror att det ska förgylla mig; för att jag vill återskapa min klassresa. Jag gömmer mig inte bakom orden, gömmer mig inte bakom tanken att detta bara är tillfälligt – att jag är här bara för att rapportera om det som sker. Jag är här för att jag är just jag; ansamlingen och konsekvenserna av en rad beslut som jag då inte kunde överblicka.

(For nearly one year I have made a living as a temp. A day laborer. [...] I do not return to labor thinking that it will gild me, wanting to re-create my class journey. I do not hide behind the words; do not hide behind the idea that this is just temporary – that I am here just to report about what is happening. I am here because I am I; the accumulation and the consequences of a series of decisions that I could not survey then.)⁵⁶²

Jag är inte bara en besökare från en skyddad plats. Jag är tillbaka där allt började för mig. Kroppslarbetet.

(I am not just some visitor from a sheltered place. I am back where it all started for me. The manual labor.)⁵⁶³

The narrator's distancing of himself from the role of the ›reporter‹ could be seen as a distancing from the ›report books‹ of the 1970's and thus also from Palm's *LM-Books*, which are generally viewed as belonging to this genre (see chapter 3). Furthermore, the discussion in *Yarden* of the relationship between personal experiences and the representation of class does, indeed, move within a different territory than the one in the *LM-Books*.

The insistence in *Yarden* on continuity between the narrator's childhood experiences and his experiences as an adult manual worker (and

⁵⁶² LUNDBERG: 2009, 49.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 52.

the description of his career as a writer and a critic as nothing but a temporary detour from a life trajectory determined by his class affiliation) creates an intimate connection between class and individual identity. The image in *Yarden* of the narrator is an image of someone who on a fundamental level *is* and *remains* working-class, no matter what happens in his life. (And what does happen to him is described as being determined by the fact that he belongs to the working class.)

This view of class as something hermetic with un-transcendable boundaries is of fundamental importance for the discussion in *Yarden* of the representation of class. If class is hermetic, it can only be represented from *within*. Thus, the narrator's representation of class must take the form of a *testimony* of personal experience. That this is the narrator's own understanding of his narration is made clear in the following formulation: »Den som skriver är också den som vittnar. Och jag vill så gärna berätta. Detta är jag; detta är det liv som jag lever, som jag inte alltid väljer, som jag inte alltid kan säga: detta är jag« (The one who writes is also the one who gives witness. And I would very much like to narrate. This is I; this is the life that I live, that I do not always choose; about which I cannot always say: this is I).⁵⁶⁴

However, the understanding of class as a hermetic phenomenon not only necessitates that it be represented from within but also makes it virtually impossible for those who do not share these experiences to understand their representation. This problem – the impossibility of cross-class representations – is brought to the fore several times in *Yarden*. One example of this is the following comment by the narrator about one of his friends, to whom he has written about his experiences of labor and poverty: »Jag tänker att han inte förstår – inte överhuvudtaget. Jag är hemma. Och hemma där jag kommer ifrån har han aldrig varit, kommer han förmodligen aldrig att komma« (I think that he does not understand – not at all. I am at home. And at home, where I come from, he has never been, will he never come to).⁵⁶⁵ Another example can be found in the following comment: »Det är ändå ingen som tror mig. Att jag befinner mig på Yarden i isande snö; i strilande regn, i motvind. Att jag också är min mors son« (No one will believe me, anyway. That I am at The Yard in icy

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 55.

snow: in steady rain, in headwind. That I too am my mother's son).⁵⁶⁶ The narrator even doubts that the narrative's addressee – his son⁵⁶⁷ – will be able to understand his story: »Hur ska jag kunna berätta för min son vem jag är – varifrån jag kommer? Varför skulle jag ens tvinga honom att lyssna på det – vad gott skulle det göra?« (How shall I be able to tell my son who I am – where I come from? Why would I even force him to listen to that – what good would it do?).⁵⁶⁸

In direct connection with this doubting of the very possibility of giving testimony of his experiences of class, however, the narrator insists on the necessity of giving such testimony to his son: »Ändå – är det inte det enda vi kan sätta emot? Att leva i världen som vittnen? Jag kan inte tvinga honom att äta mina bittra druvor, kan inte få honom att förstå« (Still – is this not the only possible counter action? To live in the world as witnesses? I cannot force him to eat my bitter grapes; cannot make him understand).⁵⁶⁹

This insistence, in the face of its seeming impossibility, on the necessity of giving testimony could be seen as a relativizing of the idea about class as a hermetic phenomenon. After all, without the possibility of a listener who does not already have access to the object of the testimony, giving testimony seems like a totally meaningless activity. Above all, what legitimizes the narrator's role as a witness is, however, his view of the function and purpose of literature.

Early in his narrative, the narrator in *Yarden* claims that everything he tells is »sant« (true).⁵⁷⁰ However, this claim is soon juxtaposed with the insistence that (possibly) »alla biografiska rekonstruktioner måste innehålla delar och moment som är mer eller mindre lögnaktiga« (all biographical reconstructions must contain parts and moments that are more or less mendacious).⁵⁷¹ What prevents this from being a paradox is the

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 35. A similar view of class as a hermetic phenomenon, and of the impossibility of cross-class representations of class is expressed in Fridell's *Död mans hand*, where the narrator, Böhm, argues that as »meningslöst som livet är för oss bottendjur, lika likgiltiga är mina underliga funderingar för andra än oss själva« (meaningless as life is for us animals on the bottom, as insignificant are my strange speculations to others than ourselves) (FRIDELL: 1946, 203).

⁵⁶⁹ LUNDBERG: 2009, 35.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 19.

narrator's commitment to the idea that representations do not re-produce, but *produce* reality, an idea that is expressed, for example, in the following formulations:

Det jag inte talar om har aldrig skett, det jag beskriver är det jag genomlever.

(What I don't talk about has never happened, what I describe is what I experience.)⁵⁷²

Varje morgon när jag vaknar sätter jag mig ner vid köksbordet och skriver ett par rader i min anteckningsbok. Jag låter handen föras fram. Jag drar den tillbaka. Världen framträder. Den gör sig tydlig. Jag blir en del av den.

(Every morning when I wake up I sit down at the kitchen table and write down a few lines in my notebook. I let the hand be passed forward. I pull it back. The world emerges. It makes itself distinct. I become a part of it.)⁵⁷³

If representations are culturally productive, rather than re-productive, then representations of class experiences remain meaningful even if they are only accessible for people who share these experiences. Then, giving testimony becomes more than a repetition of experience: it becomes a means for accessing and interpreting experience in a new way.

That the world of labor is enigmatic to the narrator as well as to other working-class people is emphasized over and over again in *Yarden*, and that this constitutes an obstacle to class consciousness and organized class struggle is pointed out, for example, in the following formulation: »Jag klarar inte av att se till mina rättigheter, eftersom jag inte vet vilka de är; borde det till exempel inte finnas ett förbud mot att handtvätta bilar i nollgradigt väder? Jag vet inte. Ahmed vet inte« (I cannot claim my rights because I do not know them; ought there not, for example, be a ban against hand washing cars when the temperature is zero degrees centigrade. I do not know. Ahmed does not know).⁵⁷⁴ That the narrator's testimony aims at turning experiences of class injustice into class consciousness, is evidenced by the following direct address to his readers:

[J]ag vet – jag är inte ensam. Jag undrar bara var alla ni andra är. Jag undrar bara varför det är så tyst. Jag sänder ut detta som ett nödbloss i natten, en raket av stjärnor och färgade ljus mot den svärtade himlen för att säga att jag är här, att ni kan komma nu, att vi kan samla oss.

572 Ibid.

573 Ibid., 22.

574 Ibid., 28.

(I know – I am not alone. I just wonder where all you others are. I just wonder why it is so quiet. I am sending out this message like a maroon in the night, a firework of stars and colored lights against the blackened sky, to tell that I am here, that you can come now, that we can gather.)⁵⁷⁵

The Class Injustices of Temporary Agency Work

At the heart of the representation of the world of labor in *Yarden* is a description of what Arping has called workers' »maktlöshet på en ny arbetsmarknad, där bemanningsföretagen slagit sönder all organiserings« (powerlessness on a new labor market, where temporary work agencies have shattered all organization).⁵⁷⁶ This theme is important also in what is perhaps the best-known example of West-German working-class literature, namely, Günter Wallraff's undercover reportage *Ganz unten* (published in English as *Lowest of the Low*).⁵⁷⁷

In *Ganz unten*, Wallraff describes the experiences he made when assuming the identity of the Turkish »guest worker« Ali. Today, the book is best known for its critical depiction of racism, but at the time of its publication, it was, above all, its critique of how temporary work agencies bypassed the rules of the German labor market that received attention from readers and critics.⁵⁷⁸

Wallraff's/Ali's experiences of temporary agency work can be summarized as follows: Temporary agency workers are at the mercy of their employers. They have no job security and are forced to work long hours for low pay under extremely unsafe conditions. Moreover, they are often cut off from the social security system and subjected to various kinds of abuse.

Wallraff describes immigrants as the main victims of the problems listed above. Nevertheless, he also, as has been noted by Simone Sitte,⁵⁷⁹ underlines that German temporary agency workers experience many of the same problems⁵⁸⁰ and that these are spreading to more and more

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁵⁷⁶ ARPING: 2011, 194.

⁵⁷⁷ References to *Ganz unten* will be to the German edition from 2009. For direct quotations, references will also be given to the partial English translation from 1988. When the published English translation cannot be used, I present my own translations.

⁵⁷⁸ See KUHN: 1989, 193–195; SITTE: 1986, 360–362.

⁵⁷⁹ SITTE: 1986, 387.

⁵⁸⁰ WALLRAFF: 2009, 46–47 and 194.

workplaces, as workers with permanent contracts are being fired and replaced by »billige, willige und schnell zu heuernde und auch zu feuernde Leiharbeiter« (cheap, willing and easily hired, but also easily fired, temporary agency workers).⁵⁸¹

Furthermore, Wallraff claims that temporary agency work is a threat to unionization and to the development of proletarian class consciousness. One example of this is his critique of how teams of temporary agency workers are constantly reorganized by the employers: »In einer Gruppe, in der keiner den anderen richtig kennt, ist solidarisches Handeln kaum durchsetzbar, überwiegen Konkurrenz, Mißtrauen und Angst vor einander«⁵⁸² (In a group in which no one really knows anyone else, solidarity is hardly possible; competition, distrust and fear dominate).⁵⁸³

Until around 1970, temporary agency work was illegal in West Germany, and thereafter it has remained strictly regulated and restricted. Furthermore, the public image of this kind of work has, at least up until 1990, been »very poor.«⁵⁸⁴ One reason for this has been that well into the 1990s, »life-long profession and long-term employer tenure« remained ideals on the West-German – and later, German – labor market, not least among employees.⁵⁸⁵ Another reason has probably been the strong commitment in West Germany during the era of welfare-state capitalism to the corporatist ideal of social partnership between labor and capital and the widespread belief that this could be undermined by temporary agency work.

In *Ganz unten*, Wallraff's main rhetorical strategy for criticizing temporary agency work is to draw on the already existing negative attitudes toward it, above all, by presenting it as a violation of the social partnership.

When encountering representatives for temporary work agencies, Ali/Wallraff notices that no one asks for his papers, or even his name.⁵⁸⁶ The employers are thus interested neither in the employee's individual identity nor in his legal status. A temporary work agency »vermittelt eben Arbeiter ›pur‹« (quite simply supplies »pure« labor), Ali/Wallraff notices.⁵⁸⁷ A similar picture of the relationship between temporary agency

581 Ibid., 85.

582 Ibid., 89.

583 WALLRAFF: 1988, 69.

584 EUROPEAN FOUNDATION: 2002a, II.

585 Ibid., 4–5.

586 WALLRAFF: 2009, 37 and 86.

587 Ibid., 38.

workers and their employers also emerges from the following description of the owner of a temporary work agency: »Manche seiner Ausbeutungsobjekte kennt er überhaupt nicht [...], er kassiert nur«⁵⁸⁸ (He often doesn't even know the people he exploits, he just collects the money).⁵⁸⁹

This description of temporary agency work is clearly influenced by a Marxist understanding of capitalist class relations. »The bourgeoisie,« Marx and Engels write in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, »has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations [...], and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous ›cash payment.« [...] It has resolved personal worth into exchange value.«⁵⁹⁰ At the same time, however, Wallraff's description of the relationship between temporary agency workers and their employers as an a-personal one also brings to the fore the ideology of social partnership since this is connected to a narrative about how the harsh relationship between labor and capital described in the *Communist Manifesto* has been replaced by one characterized by mutual respect and cooperation. Norbert Blüm, a former conservative German labor-market minister, formulates this idea in an exemplary way in his book *Ehrliche Arbeit* (Honest Work). According to Blüm, the partnership between labor and capital corrects »[d]ie Erbsünde des Kapitalismus« (capitalism's original sin), namely, its reduction of the laborer into a commodity over which the capitalist has unlimited power.⁵⁹¹ On the basis of this partnership, Blüm argues, the capitalist enterprise is transformed »von einer Kapital-

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 172.

⁵⁸⁹ WALLRAFF: 1988, 139.

⁵⁹⁰ MARX and ENGELS: 1976, 486–487. For Marx and Engels, the rise of capitalism is a complex process. At the same time as it makes possible the exploitation of labor on a hitherto unknown scale, it also has a liberating dimension, not only since the bourgeoisie both forges »the weapons that bring death to itself,« and calls into existence »the men who are to wield those weapons – the modern working class« (MARX and ENGELS: 1976, 490) but also since its destruction of feudal ways of life rescues »a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life« (MARX and ENGELS: 1976, 488). Wallraff too, seems to recognize this complexity. One example of this can be found in Ali's/Wallraff's noticing that the reduction of temporary agency workers to personifications of the commodity of labor power sometimes undermines racism. Towards the end of the book, Wallraff's/Ali's employer is characterized in the following way: »Solange sie für ihn geduldig malochen und funktionieren, ist er der letzte, der Ressentiments gegen Ausländer hätte« (As long as they labour and work for him without complaint, he's the last person to harbour prejudices against immigrants) (WALLRAFF: 2009, 234; WALLRAFF: 1988, 192.)

⁵⁹¹ BLÜM: 2011, 203–204.

sammelstelle« (from a site for accumulation of capital) to a »Personalverband« (association between people).⁵⁹² However, he also claims that temporary agency work is a »Trojanische[s] Pferd« (Trojan horse) for the reversal of this process.⁵⁹³

By arguing that temporary agency work reduces workers to bearers of the commodity of labor power, Wallraff thus associates it with the exploitive class relations of an unregulated capitalism. This is also done in an explicit and straightforward way in *Ganz unten*. One example of this can be found in Wallraff's foreword: »Ich habe mitten in der Bundesrepublik Zustände erlebt, wie sie eigentlich sonst nur in den Geschichtsbüchern über das 19. Jahrhundert beschrieben werden«⁵⁹⁴ (Today, in the middle of West Germany, I experienced conditions which are usually only described in history books about the nineteenth century).⁵⁹⁵ Another example is the claim that a temporary agency worker has told Wallraff about »Arbeitsbedingungen und Ausbeutungsmethoden, die – nur berichtet und nicht erlebt und belegt – niemals geglaubt und allenfalls in die Zeit des finsternen Frühkapitalismus verwiesen würden«⁵⁹⁶ (working conditions and methods of exploitation, which, if only reported and not experienced and verified, would never be believed and would probably be thought to date from the darkest period of early capitalism).⁵⁹⁷

Wallraff also explicitly describes temporary agency work as a violation of the social partnership. One example of this is the following description of the employer »Adler«:

Er nennt's »zusammenarbeiten«, indem er kassiert und andere bis zum Umfallen und Verrecken für sich schuften läßt. Auch der Begriff »Mitarbeiter« ist so positiv »sozialpartnerschaftlich« besetzt, er soll wie Balsam klingen in den Ohren der Geschundenen und Ausgepreßten.⁵⁹⁸

(He calls it »working together« when he gets the money and lets others labour for him till they drop and die. And such »social partnership« phrases like »working with« and »working together« are supposed to sound like music to the ears of those crushed by sweated labour.)⁵⁹⁹

592 Ibid., 205.

593 Ibid., 211.

594 WALLRAFF: 2009, 12.

595 WALLRAFF: 1988, 2.

596 WALLRAFF: 2009, 85.

597 WALLRAFF: 1988, 66.

598 WALLRAFF: 2009, 236.

599 WALLRAFF: 1988, 193.

Through this juxtaposition of the concept of social partnership with the reality experienced by temporary agency workers, Wallraff claims that temporary agency work and social partnership are incompatible phenomena.

The description in *Yarden* of temporary agency work resembles that in *Ganz unten*, and in some cases the similarities between the texts are so strong that direct inspiration cannot be ruled out. In both works, for example, there are descriptions of how temporary agency workers are not given work gloves but instead have to pick up from trash bins used ones that permanently employed workers have thrown away.⁶⁰⁰ On a more general level, one can mention that the narrator in *Yarden* – like Wallraff – highlights how constant threats of immediate dismissal put temporary agency workers at the mercy of their foremen.⁶⁰¹ More similarities can be found in the following quotation:

Paketerna väger upp till fyrtio kilo och ska lastas upp på ett rullande band. [---]
De andra roterar, kastar paket en timme, kör sedan truck, scannar eller vad de nu gör. Så är det inte för oss inhyrda. Vi står på vår plats. [---]

Det är en olustig stämning i arbetslokalen. Jag vet att jag tagit en annans plats; att jag genom mitt arbete, min beredvillighet om man så vill, har tvingat bort en anställd, en person som plötsligt har blivit överflödig. En arbetskamrat.

(The parcels weigh up to 40 kilos and are to be loaded onto a conveyor belt. [---].
The others rotate; throw parcels for an hour, then drive a forklift, scan, or whatever it is that they do. That's not how it is for us temps. We remain in our place. [---])

There's an unpleasant atmosphere in the workplace. I know that I've taken someone else's place, that I, through my work – through being ready and willing, if you will – have forced away someone with permanent employment, someone who has suddenly become superfluous. A workmate.)⁶⁰²

Here, the narrator in *Yarden* – again, like Wallraff – describes how permanent employment is being replaced by temporary agency work, characterized by inferior conditions.⁶⁰³ At the same time, he also emphasizes – once again, like Wallraff – that the co-existence of different kinds of employment in the same workplace leads to divisions among the workers and, through the ironic use of the term »arbetskamrat« (workmate), that this is an obstacle to working-class solidarity.

⁶⁰⁰ LUNDBERG: 2009, 88; WALLRAFF: 2009, 96.

⁶⁰¹ LUNDBERG: 2009, 26, 41, 115 and 125.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 13–14.

⁶⁰³ This motif is also expressed elsewhere in *Yarden* (LUNDBERG: 2009, 52–53 and 118.)

On the level of rhetoric, there are also similarities between *Yarden* and *Ganz unten*. One of these is that both texts associate temporary agency work with ›pure‹ capitalist class relations: with the reduction of workers to bearers of the commodity of labor power. The narrator's description in *Yarden* of his first encounter with his employer, which very much resembles Wallraff's descriptions of his/Ali's meetings with employers, illustrates this:

Anställningsintervjun till Yarden blir som ett cyniskt skämt. En samling av flaskler. Vi vet bägge vad det handlar om. Det finns hundratals sådana som jag som bara väntar på att få ta plats. Här är ingen unik. Vi är bara kuggar.

(The interview for a job at The Yard resembles a cynical joke. A collection of high-sounding phrases. We both know what it is about. There are hundreds like me, just waiting for a place. Here, nobody is unique. We are just cogs.)⁶⁰⁴

Other examples include the narrator's claim that as a temporary agency worker, he »är inte ens ett namn; bara ett nummer« (isn't even a name, only a number)⁶⁰⁵ and that his value is determined by an anonymous »marknad« (market)⁶⁰⁶ or his self-characterization as someone who »kommer och går och som man aldrig behöver lära sig namnet på – en spöklik vålnad, en utbytbar kugge, en fjäder som aldrig brister« (comes and goes, and whose name one doesn't have to learn – a ghostlike creature, a replaceable cog, a spring that never breaks).⁶⁰⁷

It is, however, not only in relation to the employers/capitalists that the narrator loses his identity and individuality but also in relation to other workers:

På sätt och vis är jag inom bilindustrin. På ett annat plan är jag bara en sådan som kommer och går, en sådan vars namn man aldrig lägger på minnet. Det tar ett par veckor innan jag får ett eget skåp i omklädningsboden. Nere på gods-
speditionen, som jag också arbetar för under nätterna, får jag varken skåp eller ett eget namn. [---]

Jag är en hund. Om mig kan man säga: »Låt honom göra det! Vi ska fan inte behöva städa!« och så gör jag allt det som alla andra inte vill kännas vid.

(In one way, I'm in the car industry. On another level, I'm just one of those that come and go, one of those whose name you never remember. It takes a couple of weeks before I get my own locker in the shed where we change

604 Ibid., 33.

605 Ibid., 27.

606 Ibid., 42.

607 Ibid., 49.

clothes. Down at the forwarding company, where I work extra in the nights, I don't get a locker or a name. [---]

I'm a dog. About me you can say: »Let him do it! We should not have to clean up, for fuck sake!« and I'll do everything that all the others don't want to do.)⁶⁰⁸

Yet another similarity between the critique of temporary agency work in *Yarden* and *Ganz unten* respectively is that both texts draw on already existing ideas about this kind of work.

In Sweden, temporary work agencies were banned until the early 1990s, when the ban was replaced by one of the most liberal legislations in the world,⁶⁰⁹ and since the mid-1990s, temporary agency work has been the fastest growing sector of the Swedish labor market.⁶¹⁰ One of the most important justifications for the ban against temporary work agencies was the claim that they did not fit into the Swedish labor-market model and that they constituted a threat to both labor rights and the aims of labor-market politics.⁶¹¹ In »the popular view,« says a report from The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, temporary work agencies had »a bad reputation« and were seen as a potential means for »worker exploitation.«⁶¹² Thus, the legalization of temporary work agencies, which was preceded by 40 years of legal and political struggle,⁶¹³ and the following increase in temporary agency work has been perhaps the most debated change on the Swedish labor market in recent years.⁶¹⁴

The legalization and rise of temporary agency work in Sweden has been accompanied by attempts from employers and right-wing politicians to improve its reputation. One such attempt has been the promotion of the idea that Swedish temporary work agencies are different from those in other countries and that they are fully integrated into the Swedish labor market model. Good examples of this can be found in a book about the history of Swedish temporary work agencies, published by the agen-

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 43.

⁶⁰⁹ See JOHNSON: 2010, 18 and 85; EUROPEAN FOUNDATION: 2002b, 1; BERGSTRÖM et.al.: 2007, 7.

⁶¹⁰ See JOHNSON: 2010, 85. In 2008, approximately 122,000 workers – equaling 60,000 full-time employments, or 1.3 % of the total employed workforce – were employed by temporary work agencies (JOHNSON: 2010, 88.)

⁶¹¹ See ibid., 16; BERGSTRÖM et.al.: 2007, 7.

⁶¹² EUROPEAN FOUNDATION: 2002b, 16.

⁶¹³ See JOHNSON: 2010, 16.

⁶¹⁴ See BERGSTRÖM et.al.: 2007, 7.

cies' employer and trade federation. Here, it is emphasized that in other countries, temporary agency work is sometimes characterized by lower wages and inferior working conditions than permanent employments but that this is made impossible in Sweden by collective agreements between temporary work agencies and trade unions.⁶¹⁵ It is also claimed that temporary work agencies have become a well-functioning part of the Swedish labor market model.⁶¹⁶

Besides claiming that they do not constitute a threat to the Swedish labor market model, temporary work agencies have also promoted the view of themselves as a stepping-stone for young people and immigrants, who are not yet established on the labor market.⁶¹⁷ This was also the view of temporary work agencies held by Börje Hörnlund, who was labor market minister at the time of their legalization,⁶¹⁸ and, interestingly enough, a similar view has also been expressed by the Swedish Trade Union Confederation.⁶¹⁹

In *Yarden*, the representation of temporary agency work is constructed as a negation of these ideas. The claim that temporary agency work could serve as a stepping-stone to permanent employment, for example, is countered by the narrator's description of it as a kind of prison house of poverty. »Vi vet att vi förmodligen inte kommer längre fram i världen än så här« (We know that this is probably as far as we will ever get in this world), he says.⁶²⁰ Later he continues: »Det som gör det hela orimligt är att du aldrig kan vara säker på din inkomst. Du kan aldrig planera din inkomst eller framtid. [...] Du arbetar och är alltid fattig« (What makes the whole thing unreasonable is that you can never be sure about your

615 JOHNSON: 2010, 87.

616 JOHNSON: 2010, 7. To some extent, these claims are true. In a report from The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, for example, it is argued that the most remarkable aspect of temporary agency work in Sweden is the extent to which it is governed by collective agreements (EUROPEAN FOUNDATION: 2002b, 1). The same report also highlights the fact that most temporary agency work in Sweden is not really temporary since most temporary agency workers have permanent contracts with their agencies (ibid., 19). Therefore, it says in the report, »many of the typical problems associated with temporary work could be thought not to be relevant« (ibid.). However, it is also stated that when discussing temporary agency work in Sweden, »the issue of precariousness cannot be neglected« (ibid.).

617 JOHNSON: 210, 120.

618 See ibid., 85.

619 See »LO anmäler bemanningsföretag.«

620 LUNDBERG: 2009, 29.

income. You can never plan your income or your future. You work, and you're always poor).⁶²¹ The emphasis in *Yarden* on the differences – and antagonisms – between temporary agency workers and workers with permanent employment, as well as the linking of temporary agency work with ›pure‹ capitalist class relations, also stands in critical dialogue with the view of temporary agency work as being fully integrated into the Swedish labor market model. The narrator in *Yarden* also explicitly criticizes this view by describing how temporary agency workers work under different collective agreements than workers with permanent employment.⁶²²

Speaking Positions and Aesthetical-Political Strategies

Along with the many similarities between *Ganz unten* and *Yarden*, there are also differences. One of these concerns style and genre. Whereas the former work is a documentary reportage, the latter is a self-reflexive and poetic narrative. This difference brings to the fore differences between the conditions in the sites of literature in Sweden and West Germany respectively, as well as between the world-historical epochs in which *Yarden* and *Ganz unten* were written. The description and criticism of temporary agency work in *Ganz unten* is, above all, conditioned by the relationship between capital and labor during the epoch of welfare-state capitalism and by a literary ideology constructing aesthetics and politics as incompatible phenomena. The criticism of temporary agency work in *Yarden*, on the other hand, is conditioned by contemporary globalized capitalism, its neoliberal ideological superstructure, and by a literary climate in which working-class literature enjoys a relatively strong position.

The critique of temporary agency work in *Ganz unten* had massive political impact. Among other things, it led to legal actions against several temporary work agencies and their clients as well as to discussions in the West-German parliament about stricter regulations of the labor market.⁶²³ It also had a great effect on the discussions in the public sphere. As Hans-Ulrich Jörges puts it, the publication of *Ganz unten* sparked discussions of the

⁶²¹ Ibid., 71.

⁶²² Ibid., 65.

⁶²³ See WALLRAFF: 2009, 261–284.

»Japanisierung« des deutschen Arbeitsmarktes [...] – das heißt das Abschmelzen der Stammebelegschaften in den Betrieben und die rasante Vermehrung von Verleihfirmen, die die Lücken dann wieder mit billigeren, jederzeit zu feuernden Aushilfskräften auffüllen.

(»Japanisation« of the German labor market [...] – i.e. the reduction by companies of the permanently employed staff, and the rapid growth of temporary work agencies, filling the gaps with cheaper, easily hired and fired, temps.)⁶²⁴

Wallraff's critique also found resonance in the working class and in the labor movement. As has been pointed out by, among others, Anna A. Kuhn and Jörges, *Ganz unten* gained a wide working-class readership,⁶²⁵ and it inspired the German labor movement to formulate a far-reaching critique of temporary agency work which culminated in the German Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB) demanding a general ban of temporary work agencies.⁶²⁶

Only a few years after the publication of *Ganz unten*, however, temporary agency work got something of a breakthrough in Germany. Since the 1980s, atypical and precarious employment, including temporary work, has increased rapidly, and today temporary agency workers make up a still relatively small but fast growing part of the labor force in Germany.⁶²⁷ This development has been made possible by legislative changes.⁶²⁸ However, the general image of temporary agency work has also changed, and »the previous image of a modern slave-trade has been weakened.«⁶²⁹ In other words, the picture of temporary agency work promoted by Wallraff in *Ganz unten* has been successfully challenged by that put forward by neoliberal ideologists, namely, one in which the increase of precarious work, including temporary agency work, is presented

624 JÖRGES: 2009, 314.

625 KUHN: 1989, 202; JÖRGES: 2009, 312.

626 See WALLRAFF: 2009, 284.

627 See BISPINCK and SCHULTEN: 2011, 1–2 and 10. Until the year 2000, only 1 % of all regular employees subject to social insurance in Germany were temporary agency workers, but in April of 2011 their total number had risen to 860,000, or 2.6 % of all regular employees (BISPINCK and SCHULTEN: 2011, 10).

628 In 2000, restrictions on various forms of precarious employment were suspended by the red-green federal government (BISPINCK and SCHULTEN: 2011, 29). In 2003, the legislation for temporary work agencies, the »Arbeitnehmerüberlassungsgesetz,« was subjected to far-reaching deregulation (BISPINCK and SCHULTEN: 2011, 10), and in 2004, the passing of the »Teilzeit- und Befristungsgesetz« further relaxed earlier strict restrictions regarding temporary employments (BISPINCK and SCHULTEN: 2011, 6).

629 EUROPEAN FOUNDATION: 2002a, 11.

as »a necessary precondition to improve competitiveness and to promote growth and employment.«⁶³⁰

In recent years, a counteroffensive against this promotion of temporary agency work has been launched by German trade unions, who have made the struggle against precarious employment, including temporary agency work, and its negative effects for workers, a top priority.⁶³¹ The general aim for this struggle is to make »non-limited jobs with full access to social and labour rights the standard form of employment.«⁶³² The trade unions have, to a large extent, focused on legislation, collective agreements, and on giving practical help to workers in precarious employment, but efforts have also been made to develop and promote »a union vision for ›good work‹.«⁶³³

Wallraff has taken part in these struggles. Among other things, he has supported and contributed to the most comprehensible and visible campaign of the German trade unions in recent years against precarious employment, namely, the one for the introduction of a national statutory minimum wage.⁶³⁴ One example of this is that he acted as co-publisher – together with the heads of the trade unions ver.di and NGG: Franz Bsirske and Franz-Josef Möllenberg – of the book *Leben ohne Mindestlohn* (Life Without the Minimum Wage), to which he also wrote a foreword. In this foreword, he highlights the role of temporary work agencies in current labor-market trends, arguing that »[d]er massive Missbrauch der Leiharbeit in den vergangenen Jahren« (the massive abuse in recent years of temporary agency work) constitutes a good example of how »Unternehmen in Zeiten der Globalisierung jede Regelungslücke nutzen, um

630 BISPINCK and SCHULTEN: 2011, 57.

631 Ibid., 2–3 and 28. The perhaps most obvious example of these negative effects is that temporary agency workers' wages are often very low. The average gross monthly pay for temporary agency workers is 1,456 Euros in western Germany, 1,224 Euros in eastern Germany, and only 19.1 % make more than 2,000 Euros per month (compared to 70 % of the total workforce) (BISPINCK and SCHULTEN: 2011, 18). Another way to illustrate the low wages for temporary agency workers is to compare their average monthly income of 1,456 Euros per month to that of the total workforce, which is 2,805 Euros (both figures are for western Germany) (BISPINCK and SCHULTEN: 2011, 18). One could also mention that 11.5 % of the temporary agency workers in Germany depend on basic social assistance (»Harz IV«), compared to 2.6 % of all employees (BISPINCK and SCHULTEN: 2011, 19).

632 Ibid., 28.

633 Ibid.

634 See *ibid.*, 38.

ihre Kosten mit Verweis auf den ›harten Wettbewerb‹ weiter abzusenken« (companies in the era of globalization take advantage of any loophole in their attempts to further reduce their costs, while pleading ›tough competition‹ as an excuse).⁶³⁵ »Die Profiteure der Leiharbeitsbranche« (The profiteers in the temporary work agencies), he also claims,

brauchen keine langfristigen Verpflichtungen gegenüber ihren Arbeitnehmern mehr einzugehen. Urlaubsgeld, Krankengeld, Rentenzahlungen: alles überflüssige Kosten, der reinste »Sozialklimbim.« Nicht einmal Heuern und Feuern ist mehr nötig, gegen das sich immer wieder unangenehmerweise ganze Belegschaften mit kostenträchtigen Widerstandsaktionen auflehnen. Nein, das Menschenmaterial wird einfach zeitnah und konfliktfrei angemietet, wie ein Presslufthammer, eine Hebebühne oder ein Kleinlaster.

(no longer need to make any long-term commitments to their employees. Paid vacation, health insurance, and pension: all unnecessary costs, pure »social junk.« Hiring and firing, a practice that repeatedly leads to expensive acts of resistance from entire staffs, is not even necessary anymore. No, human material is quite simply rented, quickly and without conflicts, just like a jackhammer, a car lift or a lorry.)⁶³⁶

This critique of temporary agency work for reducing workers to bearers of the commodity of labor power resembles that formulated in *Ganz unten*. However, in his contemporary writing, Wallraff's tone is much more pessimistic than in his works from the 1980s.

This pessimistic tone gets its clearest expression in the afterword to Wallraff's latest reportage book, *Aus der schönen neuen Welt* (From the Brave New World), where he argues that the working conditions for German temporary agency workers are among the worst in Europe and that this is indicative of a lowering of the »Arbeitsbedingungen« (working conditions) to a »frühkapitalistisches Niveau [...] – als habe es die Gewerkschafts- und Arbeiterbewegung und ihre Erfolge nie gegeben« (early-capitalist level [...] – as if the trade unions and the labor movement, and their successes, had never existed).⁶³⁷ In this text, Wallraff also expresses a very pessimistic view regarding the political potential of his own works:

Als ich vor über 40 Jahren mit meiner Arbeit begann, erhoffte nicht nur ich, sondern vielleicht die Mehrheit eine stetige Entwicklung hin zu mehr Menschlichkeit und zu mehr Gerechtigkeit. Ich will immer noch mit meinen Reportagen und Büchern dazu beitragen, dass dieser Prozess vorankommt, allerdings

635 WALLRAFF: 2011, II.

636 Ibid., 13.

637 WALLRAFF: 2010, 317.

mit zunehmender Skepsis. Zu viele Rückschritte haben wir in den letzten Jahren erleben müssen: Die Ungerechtigkeit hat zugenommen, menschlicher sind die Lebensverhältnisse nicht geworden, im Gegenteil.

(When I started my work 40 years ago, not only I, but also perhaps a majority, hoped for a continuous development towards more humanity and more justice. I still want to contribute with my books and my reportages to this process, but I have become more and more skeptical. We have experienced too many setbacks in recent years: the injustice has increased; the living conditions have not become more, but less, human.)⁶³⁸

This pessimism is, at least in part, a consequence of a major shift in European politics following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Niels Jul Nielsen has demonstrated that in the Western countries during the decades after World War II, labor was considered to be key factor in world affairs because of the fear that workers may be won for communism and might, thus, open up a cold-war front *within* the capitalist societies.⁶³⁹ One consequence of this was the emergence of a speaking position from which it was possible to articulate political demands *as a member of the working class*. After the collapse of Soviet communism, however, labor has »fuldkommen mistet sin strategiske betydning« (has lost its strategic role entirely).⁶⁴⁰ Today, workers are no longer viewed as having any »specifikke interesser inden for samfundsbygningen« (specific interests within the social organization),⁶⁴¹ and the »taleposition, der tidligere knyttede sig til det at være »arbejder« – med den implicite betydning, at man var arbejder-med-potentiale-til-en-større-mobilisering – er næsten forsvundet« (speaking position, that was earlier connected to being a »worker« – implicitly meaning that one was a worker-with-the-potential-to-be-mobilized-as-part-of-the-masses – has almost disappeared).⁶⁴²

This development constitutes a major challenge to the aesthetical-political strategies deployed by Wallraff in *Ganz unten*. Articulating workers' experiences of class injustices in a rhetorically effective way does, quite simply, make very little sense in an age when neither the workers experiencing these injustices nor their political representatives in the labor movement have access to any speaking position from which demands that these injustices be remedied would have any political force.

638 Ibid., 317–318.

639 JUL NIELSEN: 2004, II–13.

640 Ibid., 325.

641 Ibid., II.

642 Ibid., 325.

Of course, these developments constitute a problem also for Swedish writers who want to criticize class injustice. However, unlike their German colleagues, they are not totally dependent on the worker's speaking position in politics since they have access to a speaking position in literature: the speaking position of the working-class *writer*.

This position is available because of the consecration of the tradition of working-class literature as a central strand in modern Swedish literature. This consecration, in turn, is, at least to some extent, a product of the strength of organized labor in Swedish politics (see chapter 1). Literary developments are, however, not passive products of political (or economic) conditions. This is indicated not least by the fact that working-class writers have continued to enjoy relatively strong positions in Swedish literature even during periods when the working-class has been on the defense in politics, perhaps, the best example of which is the contemporary revival of working-class literature to which Lundberg's *Yarden* belongs. The working-class writer's speaking position in literature is, in other words, relatively autonomous from the worker's speaking position in politics; this means that while the worker's speaking position in the sphere of politics may no longer exist in the contemporary post-industrial and multicultural Sweden, it may very well still remain in Swedish literature as the working-class writer's speaking position.

That organized labor has lost much of its power in contemporary Sweden is thematized in *Yarden* for example in the following comment:

Det är mer än tjugo år sedan jag arbetade i hamnen senast. [---]

Hamnavtalet var fördelaktigt, precis som det är nu. [---]

Jag tillhörde också, ett kort tag, fackförbundet – och imponerades över arbetsplatsbiblioteket som fanns där. [---]

Ärligt talat: de flesta av oss tillhör inte ens ett fackförbund, eftersom det inte är lönt [...].

(It is more than twenty years since the last time I worked in the harbor. [---])

The collective agreement in the harbor was advantageous, just like it is today. [---]

I was, for a short while, a member of the trade union, and was impressed by its library. [---]

Seriously speaking: most of us are not even members of a trade union, since it doesn't pay off [...].⁶⁴³

643 LUNDBERG: 2009, 65.

The critique in *Yarden* of how the working class is made invisible can also be viewed as a thematization of the disappearance of the worker's speaking position from the public sphere. In literature, however, the narrator sees the possibility of creating a platform for class politics, as is evidenced by the fact that he gives his critique of class injustice a decidedly *literary* form as well as by his insistence that his *writing* constitutes a space where those who have no language may speak:

Jag borde skriva. Jag borde sända ut brev efter brev, jag borde skapa en plats där alla de språklösa fick möjlighet att tala – där det inte längre är för sent.

(I ought to write. I ought to send out one letter after the other, I ought to create a space where all those who have no language were given a chance to speak – where it no longer is too late.)⁶⁴⁴

This claiming of a speaking position for working-class politics in literature could be viewed as a defensive strategy. After all, without support from the political labor movement and from trade unions, the possibility for writers to have political impact is very limited. However, the fact that the relationship between literature and other parts of the social totality is *overdetermined* enables the use of the working-class writer's speaking position in literature as a platform for the resurrection of the worker's speaking position in politics. After all, if the labor movement's political strength could help working-class writers gain recognition in the site of literature, the opposite development cannot be impossible.

In the age of triumphant globalized capitalism, traditional aesthetical-political strategies thus need to be rethought. Because of the weakening of the worker's speaking position in politics, the site of literature appears to be a more promising platform for literary working-class politics.

Furthermore, in an epoch in which the working-class has all but lost its speaking position in politics, a direct orientation towards the political may even be directly counter-productive since it could alienate writers from that sphere in which it may still be possible to articulate a radical working-class politics, namely, the sphere of literature.

Wallraff's choice of a realistic and communicative style was a direct consequence of his orientation toward the sphere of politics. »Für mich« (For me), he argued at the time of the publication of *Ganz unten*,

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., 62.

hat realistische Literatur noch immer die größere und durchschlagendere Aussagekraft und Wirkungsmöglichkeit, sie ist für die Mehrheit der Bevölkerung verständlich [...] und führt eher zu Konsequenzen als die Phantasie des Dichters.

(realistic literature still has greater power and greater possibility to make an impact; it is understandable [...] for the majority of the population, and is more likely than the poet's imagination to have consequences.)⁶⁴⁵

He did, however, also demonstrate awareness that this orientation away from the literary was one of the reasons for the marginalization of his works in the site of literature.⁶⁴⁶

Swedish working-class writers, on the other hand, have seldom experienced literariness as a problem. On the contrary they have often – as did Lo-Johansson in one of his late essays – argued that the status as »ett konstverk« (a work of art) is what gives a working-class novel its political force.⁶⁴⁷

Åsa Arping has described *Yarden* as a work bringing to the fore questions about »vad som händer med arbetssubjekt och identitet när arbetaren osynliggörs« (what happens to working-class subjectivity and working-class identity when the worker is made invisible) and about which »nya vägar« (new paths) Swedish working-class literature should explore.⁶⁴⁸ The comparison above of the aesthetical-political strategies in *Yarden* and *Ganz unten* respectively aims at emphasizing that these two things are intimately connected. The representation of class in *Yarden* does indeed bring to the fore questions about the disappearance from contemporary political discourse of the working class and of the injustices suffered by this class. Furthermore, its radical orientation toward the site of literature does indeed represent an exploration of a (not necessarily new but, nevertheless, potentially fruitful) path for working-class literature.

Toward a Class Politics for the Twenty-First Century

Because of the greater possibilities of addressing questions about class and class injustice in working-class literature than in other sites in society, this literature may be viewed as constituting an avant-garde in contemporary Swedish class politics. However, this status could also be con-

⁶⁴⁵ WALLRAFF: 1984, 16.

⁶⁴⁶ See HENKE-GAEHME and HENKE: 1986, 135.

⁶⁴⁷ LO-JOHANSSON: 1988, 25.

⁶⁴⁸ ARPING: 2011, 194.

nected to working-class literature's ability to produce *new* understandings of the phenomena of class and class injustice and, thus, to its possible function as a platform from which *new kinds of socialist class politics* could be developed.

As Michael Heinrich has pointed out, Marxists can speak of social classes in two distinct senses:

In a structural sense, classes are determined by their position in the social process of production. To that extent, somebody can belong to a particular social class without necessarily being aware of it. Distinct from this are classes in a historical sense. These are social groups that in a particular historical situation understand themselves to be classes as distinct from other classes; the members of the class distinguish themselves by means of a common »class consciousness.«⁶⁴⁹

These two senses of class are often conceptualized as class *in* and *for* itself, with the point of departure in the following formulation in Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy*:

Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people [...] into workers. The domination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle [...] this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests.⁶⁵⁰

A class for itself is thus a class in the historical sense that is conscious of its existence as a class in a structural sense and therefore can act politically in accordance with its class interests.⁶⁵¹

From a political perspective, the labor movement constitutes the most important (set of) historical manifestation(s) of the working class. In the labor movement, workers have become a class for itself through specific forms of class consciousness, on the basis of which they have asserted their class interests. When compared to the working class in a structural sense, however, it becomes obvious that this manifestation is rather narrow.

⁶⁴⁹ HEINRICH: 2012, 192.

⁶⁵⁰ MARX and ENGELS: 1976, 211.

⁶⁵¹ A similar view is also put forward in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, where Marx argues that insofar as the small-holding peasants in nineteenth century France »live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class,« but since »the identity of their interests begets no community [...] and no political organisation among them,« they are »incapable of enforcing their class interest in their own name,« and hence »do not form a class« (MARX and ENGELS: 1978, 187).

In Marxist theory, the fundamental conceptualizing of the working class (in a structural sense) is that it consists of wage laborers who produce surplus labor that is appropriated by capitalists in the form of surplus value. When describing this process in *Capital*, Marx often uses industrial production as an example. He does, however, also highlight, as in the following paragraph, that workers' production of surplus value for capitalists is in no way unique to this kind of production:

Capitalist production is not merely the production of commodities, it is essentially the production of surplus value. The labourer produces, not for himself, but for capital. It no longer suffices, therefore, that he should simply produce. He must produce surplus value. That labourer alone is productive, who produces surplus value for the capitalist, and thus works for the self-expansion of capital. If we may take an example from outside the sphere of production of material objects, a schoolmaster is a productive labourer, when, in addition to belabouring the heads of his scholars, he works like a horse to enrich the school proprietor. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of in a sausage factory, does not alter the relation.⁶⁵²

This quote indicates that the working class in a structural sense is wider than its historical manifestation in the labor movement. In Sweden, for example, the social-democratic trade unions do not organize teachers, and when having articulated their politics from the worker's speaking position, Swedish labor-movement parties have been speaking mainly for blue-collar workers, while often ignoring white-collar workers producing surplus value for their capitalist employers (such as teachers in private schools).⁶⁵³

652 MARX and ENGELS: 1995, 510.

653 The historical manifestation of the working class in the Swedish labor movement could, in some respects, be viewed as being wider than the working class in a structural sense. Examples of this include the fact that the social-democratic trade unions organize publicly employed workers, such as nurses, road builders, and bus drivers as well as workers employed in the sphere of circulation, such as shop assistants. Both publicly employed workers and workers employed in the sphere of circulation seem to fall outside of the working class in a structural sense since they do not produce surplus value for capitalists. Capitalists do not employ the former, and the latter do not *produce*, according to Marx, any value at all – and, hence, no *surplus* value – but merely contribute to »the conversion« of already existing values »from one form into another« (MARX and ENGELS: 1997, 152). The analysis of the relationship between these groups of workers and the working class in a structural sense does, however, fall outside the scope of this text, even if it could very well contribute to my argument that there is a mismatch between the Swedish labor-movement manifestation of the working class and the working class in a structural sense.

Another example of this mismatch – of the historical manifestation of the working class in the Swedish labor movement being narrower than the working class in a structural sense – is that the labor movement has often excluded self-employed workers, for example, by not allowing them to join social-democratic trade unions. Heinrich points out, however, that the question of »who belongs to what class in a structural sense [...] cannot be determined according to formal properties, such as the existence of a wage-relationship, but only by the position occupied within the process of production,« and that »many self-employed people (who might even own some small means of production)« are, hence, »still proletarians, who live *de facto* from the sale of their labor-power, except that this occurs under potentially worse conditions than under a formal wage relationship.«⁶⁵⁴

The labor movement's narrow understanding of the working class constitutes a major obstacle for its possibilities to formulate a politics for the assertion of the class interests of this class. This is true not least in contemporary Sweden, where more and more blue-collar jobs are being outsourced to other parts of the world, where capital is increasingly accumulated in service production (including private schools) rather than in industrial production, and where more and more workers are formally self-employed. If, in this changing class reality, the working class in a structural sense is conflated with its historical manifestation in the labor movement, then it may very well appear as if this class is disappearing, and the very idea of a labor movement is on its way to becoming an anachronism. In addition to this, the labor movement's narrow conceptualization of the working class also limits its potential basis and hampers its possibilities to identify and assert this class' class interests.

It is in relation to this mismatch between the working class in a structural sense and its historical manifestation in the labor movement as a class for itself that one aspect of Swedish working-class literature's status as an avant-garde in contemporary class politics becomes visible. Like their predecessors, contemporary working-class writers struggle against dated understandings of the working class. In *Yarden*, for example, Lundberg presents a radical attempt at rethinking the very concept of the working class in contemporary post-industrial and multicultural Sweden. Similar efforts can also be found also in the works of other contemporary

654 HEINRICH: 2012, 193.

Swedish working-class writers, in which focus seldom lies on the blue-collar workers that have traditionally occupied center stage in the labor movement's political imaginary, but instead on class injustices in service production. Måns Wadensjö (born 1988), Marie Hållander (born 1981), Johan Jönson, and Sara Beischer (born 1983), for example, all write about workers in the care industry, whereas Jenny Wrangborg and Henrik Johansson (born 1973) describe work in restaurants, and Emil Boss's poetry thematizes the author's experiences of working as a store clerk. Thus, these writers not only contribute to keeping open a platform in literature for the critique of class injustice but also make possible new conceptualizations of the phenomenon of the working class that, in turn, could serve as the foundation for new forms of class consciousness and, consequently, for changes in the ways in which the working class can manifest itself as a class for itself. Thereby, they make important contributions to the struggle for the development of a socialist class politics for the twenty-first century.

Another important contribution from contemporary Swedish working-class writers to the development of new forms of class consciousness is their attempts to produce new understandings of the relationship between class and other processes in the social totality. This is an endeavor that is especially important in contemporary multicultural societies, where ethnic, racial, and gendered differences, among others, may obscure class injustices and where class injustices are obviously intersected with injustices pertaining to status subordination.⁶⁵⁵ In the class reality of contemporary Sweden, the understanding of the relationship between class and other processes must thus take as its point of departure the insight that »individuals,« as Resnick and Wolff put it, »typically participate in more than one kind of class process« and that »their interests and alliances with others are determined, or rather overdetermined, by all the processes of social life, not only the various kinds of class processes.«⁶⁵⁶

655 For a discussion of the relationship between class politics and politics relating to cultural differences, see NILSSON: 2008.

656 RESNICK and WOLFF: 1986, 11. This insight leads Resnick and Wolff to argue that classes should not »be considered to be actual groups of persons« (RESNICK and WOLFF: 1986, 110). This argument does, however, become rather meaningless if the distinction between class in a structural and historical sense is upheld. Resnick and Wolff also qualify it by establishing an analytical distinction between »class process« and »class,« the latter concept signifying »subdivisions among people according to the particular positions they occupy in the class process« (RESNICK and WOLFF: 1986, 117).

This is indeed an important theme in contemporary Swedish working-class literature. As an example, one can mention that in Susanna Alakoski's novel *Svinalängorna* (The Rows of Pig Houses), which occupies a central position in this literature, the protagonist's destiny is described as being a product of such factors as »kön/genus, klass och nationalitet/ethnicitet« (sex/gender, class, and nationality/ethnicity).⁶⁵⁷ An even better example, however, is the thematization in *Yarden* of how ethnicity plays a key role in the class reality experienced by the narrator and how common class interests exist side by side with ethnic differences.

It is because of this ability to rethink the phenomenon of class that Swedish working-class literature constitutes an avant-garde in contemporary class politics.

⁶⁵⁷ NILSSON: 2010a, 159.

Concluding Remarks

Swedish working-class literature is, among other things, a process for the cultural production of class. Throughout its history, it has brought questions about class to the fore, and it has contributed to the formulation of various forms of critique of class injustices. During the decades following World War II, for example, working-class writers such as Folke Fridell and Kurt Salomonson criticized, from a Marxist perspective, the capitalist relations of production as well as the capitalist organization of industrial production, and later this critique has been further developed by, among others, Göran Palm and Kristian Lundberg.

The highlighting of class and the critique of class injustice in Swedish working-class literature has led to conflicts between this literature and other processes for the cultural production of class. Above all, it has clashed with socially hegemonic cultural processes contributing to the reproduction of capitalist relations of production through the obscuring of class conflict. During the epoch of welfare-state capitalism, the critique of class in working-class literature was formulated in critical response to the idea that class conflict had been abolished in the Swedish welfare state. Later, working-class writers' representations of class and class injustice have struggled with ideas about how the transformation of Sweden into a post-industrial or multicultural society has made the category of class obsolete for understanding contemporary society.

In other words, Swedish working-class literature is involved in cultural class struggle. Its interventions into this struggle are, however, always mediated through the site of literature, and therefore they have also been interventions in aesthetic struggles within this site. In the 1940s and 1950s, these struggles were primarily about the legitimacy of class and class injustice as literary motifs, but from the late 1960s and onwards, they have increasingly involved questions about literary form.

The consecration of the tradition of working-class literature as a central strand in modern Swedish literature has played an important role for the aesthetical-political strategies developed in this literature. Claiming membership in this tradition – for example, through alluding to or quoting from older working-class literature in their works – has been an important way for working-class writers to claim legitimacy in the site of literature for their radical literary representations of class. The strength

for working-class literature in this site has also increased the impact of its critique of class injustices in the site of politics.

Nevertheless, many working-class writers have displayed an ambivalent relationship to the tradition of working-class literature, which has frequently manifested itself in calls for its renewal. The motivation for this has often been that political and economic changes have made the literary and political strategies developed in older working-class literature dated. One example of this is Fridell's claim in the 1940s that the working-class literature of the 1930s was out of touch with the reality facing industrial workers in the social-democratic welfare state. Other examples are the turn to documentarism and modernism in the late 1960s and the 1970s, which was influenced by the New Left's ideology critique of the bourgeois realism allegedly constituting the aesthetic backbone of Swedish working-class literature or Lundberg's insistence on the need for claiming a platform for the critique of class injustice *in literature*, which is conditioned by the new context for literary working-class politics following the weakening in the age of triumphant globalized capitalism of the worker's speaking position in politics. The frequent calls for renewal of the tradition of working-class literature have, in other words, been aiming at adapting this tradition to contemporary class reality and at refining the literary forms developed within it for the critique of class injustice.

The existence of a strong tradition of working-class literature has thus played an important role for the aesthetical-political strategies developed by Swedish working-class writers. This insight is fundamental for the understanding of the history of Swedish working-class literature. However, it may also be of vital importance for the development of a literary criticism aiming at articulating »its ›cultural‹ analysis with a consistent political intervention.«²⁵⁴

According to Eagleton, a precondition for the articulation of cultural analysis with political intervention is that cultural artifacts are not viewed as »immutable revelations,« but instead as »projects to be strategically reconstructed in changing historical conditions.«²⁵⁵ From a Marxist perspective, this is exactly what theories do since, as Resnick and Wolff put it, the relationship between a theory and its »reality« is overdetermined,

254 EAGLETON: 2009, 98.

255 Ibid., 116.

and hence theories take part in »shaping what is observed.«²⁵⁶ Since the objective for Marxist theory is to »help change the class structure« of the social formation by producing »knowledge of the overdetermined [...] social totality that focuses upon class,«²⁵⁷ a Marxist criticism of Swedish working-class literature must aim at constructing this literature in a way which promotes such change.

This study has aimed at such a construction in two ways. First, by focusing on Swedish working-class literature's interventions into the cultural production of class, it has added to the »class knowledge« of the social totality.²⁵⁸ Second, by focusing on the *tradition* of working-class literature, it has contributed to a construction of this literature that facilitates its intervention in cultural class struggle.

256 RESNICK and WOLFF: 1989, 9.

257 *Ibid.*, 89–90.

258 *Ibid.*, 89.

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