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2019


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From In-Betweenness to Invisibility: Changing Representations of Sweden Finnish Authors

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Abstract
In this article, I examine representations of Sweden Finnish authors Antti Jalava and Susanna Alakoski in Swedish literature reviews in the 1980s and 2000s. The study builds on constructivist views of ethnicity and identity in order to understand Sweden Finns’ changing status in a multicultural Sweden. In addition, the article discusses Sweden Finnish literature in relation to recent studies and debates on immigrant literature in Sweden.

Sweden Finns are a Finnish ethno-linguistic group, who were recognized as a national minority in Sweden in 2000. Immigrants and their descendants are generally excluded from minority policies. Although Finns and the Finnish language have a historical presence in Sweden, most present-day Finnish speakers in Sweden, or those identifying themselves as Sweden Finns, have their background in post-World War II labor migration or even in more recent migration. In addition to integration, Sweden Finns’ status as a national minority derives from a growing awareness of Finnish history in Sweden, but also from a unique combination of national, bilateral Finnish Swedish politics as well as Nordic cooperation. Therefore, the rapid change in Sweden Finns’ societal status from immigrants to a national minority in a few decades raises questions about how different ethnic and cultural boundaries are drawn and redrawn in different times. In order to examine these changing ethnic categories, I use critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze how the Swedish majority media have portrayed authors with Finnish background at different times, and how these representations reflect Sweden Finns’ changing societal status in Sweden. As material, eighteen literature reviews from Swedish newspapers regarding Antti Jalava’s novel Asfaltblomman (1980) and Susanna Alakoski’s novel Svinalängorna (2006) are analyzed with a focus on author representations and questions of ethnicity and authenticity.
The results of the study show that author representations reflect Sweden Finns’ integration into Swedish society. While Jalava was mostly depicted as an immigrant or as “neither Swedish nor Finnish” in the early 1980s, Alakoski was instead seen foremost as part of the Swedish literary canon through representation as a working-class author. However, despite Sweden Finns’ recognition as a national minority, as well as Alakoski’s own migrant background, she was represented neither as a Sweden Finn nor as someone with an immigrant background, although her Finnish background was implicitly acknowledged. Therefore, the study also contributes to contemporary studies of immigrant literature in Sweden by highlighting the exoticizing and racializing aspects of the contemporary discursive construction of “immigrant literature” and “immigrant author.”

Introduction

In Sweden, literature has emerged as a central platform in the new millennium for discussing cultural diversity and identity with a key focus on relationships between different social classes as well as minority-majority relationships (Nilsson 2010). At the same time, in a growing body of literature, authors have acknowledged the need to compare and observe processes that historically and discursively construct specific literary categories, rather than view them as subjective and fixed entities (Behschnitt and Nilsson 2013; Gröndahl 2007; Kongslien 2005; Nilsson 2010). Additionally, the growing transcultural nature of contemporary literary fields has raised a need to critically evaluate the meaning of the prevailing national perspective in literature studies (Grönstrand et al. 2016).

Immigrant literature had already come into existence in the Swedish literary field in the post-World War II era with the increasing diversification of Swedish society (Gröndahl 2002; Nilsson 2013). However, the new millennium marked a turning point in this previously little explored literary field with the emergence of a new generation of immigrant authors whose works were interpreted as expressions of ethnic otherness in Swedish society. This so-called ethnic turn in Swedish literature has raised counter-arguments among both literary critics and academics. The criticism has been mainly directed at how notions of “immigrant literature” and “immigrant author” have been constructed in the biographical framework of these authors and consequently produced othering and exoticizing effects (Behschnitt and Nilsson 2013; Kongslien 2005; Nilsson 2010).

With their roots in the post-World War II labor migration, Sweden Finns comprise one of the biggest immigrant groups in Sweden today. Although they were recognized as a national minority in 2000 and were, therefore, politically constructed as part of Swedishness and Swedish national history, an immigrant perspective is still largely present in Sweden Finnish memory and cultural practices (see Huss and Syrjänen Schaal 2013). Authors with a Finnish background have written literature in Sweden for decades, but they have been largely absent in the debates tackling the deconstruction of the concepts of “immigrant literature”
and “immigrant authors” (see, e.g., Kongsløen 2005). Instead, literature written by Finnish authors in Sweden has been categorized varying in as minority literature, immigrant literature, working-class literature, Sweden Finnish literature, or even Finnish literature, depending on which temporal and cultural contexts these categorizations derive from. This demonstrates the transcultural and multispatial nature of this literary field (see, e.g., Gröndahl 2002; Kivimäki and Rantonen 2010; Pynnönen 1991; Wendelius 2002).

Because of these changing and often overlapping categories, in this article, I study the reception of Sweden Finnish literature in Sweden and examine representations of Finnish-born authors in different decades in Swedish newspapers especially in relation to questions of ethnicity and authenticity. Therefore, in this case study, I take the perspective of a Swedish majority as my starting point. I have chosen literature reviews of Antti Jalava’s *Asfaltblomman* (Asphaltflower, 1980) and Susanna Alakoski’s *Svinalängorna* (Swine projects, 2006) as case examples. Both novels were widely celebrated in Sweden at the time of their publication, and both the novels and their authors have many things in common. Additionally, the Sweden Finnish community identifies both authors as Sweden Finnish authors (see Tikkanen-Rózsa 2015). In the theoretical background, I discuss how different cultural and temporal contexts of interpretation affect literary categorizations by examining both the construction of “immigrant literature” and “Sweden Finnish literature.” Examining different contexts of interpretation in relation to the reception of Sweden Finnish literature in Sweden contributes especially to our understanding of the position of Finns in Swedish society in different decades by discussing the intertwining notions of ethnicity and class. Additionally, the study offers some important insights both into the understanding of Sweden Finnish literature as well as the constructs “immigrant literature” and “immigrant author.”

**Constructing an Immigrant Author: Sweden Multiculturalism in the Literary Field**

A growing interest in multicultural literature in Sweden has emerged in recent decades with multicultural literature being generally understood in the context of migration, multiculturalism, and multilingualism (Behschnitt and Nilsson 2013). At the beginning of the new millennium, a new generation of immigrant authors, such as Jonas Hassen Khemiri, Johannes Anyuru, and Marjaneh Bakhtiari, attracted wide attention in Sweden from both the public and the critics. Most importantly, they were portrayed as the voices of a new multicultural Sweden. At the same time, a growing body of research began to emphasize successfully that, similar to ethnicity, “immigrant literature” or “immigrant author” should also be viewed as discursive categories, which are in a dialectic relationship.
with the society (Behschnitt and Nilsson 2013; Nilsson 2010). Behschnitt and Nilsson (2013) explain that the emerging interest in multicultural and immigrant literature in Sweden has been dialectically intertwined with a new self-image of Sweden as a multicultural society. However, Nilsson (2010) argues that this multiculturalism is largely imagined, since it has required a counter-narrative of a historically homogenous Sweden, which has become multicultural only through immigration. This has led to an increasing emphasis on ethnicity as the definer and characterizer of contemporary society, leading sometimes to an even exaggerated focus on ethnicity and ethnic differences. This is exemplified in the growing dichotomy between immigrant culture and Swedish culture with the notion of “immigrant” becoming increasingly racialized, affecting not only those who have migrated but also the children of these migrants. In contrast, the term “immigrant” is decreasingly used in everyday speech to refer to, for instance, white migrants from English-speaking and Nordic countries (Behschnitt and Nilsson 2013; see also Borevi and Strömblad 2004).

In line with other categorizations, literary categories depict, above all, the majority’s desire to define different groups (Latomaa 2010; see also Extra and Gor ter 2001). Gokieli (2017) reminds us that marketability and commercialization are also embedded in these categories, providing the authors simultaneously the means to draw attention and to gain success and authority. Although multicultural literature emerged in Sweden as early as in the 1970s, it has been argued that the construction of immigrant literature has been relatively fixed, and it, therefore, remained unchallenged in public debate before the twenty-first century (Gröndahl 2002; Wendelius 2002). It is thus important not only to acknowledge the processes and practices that have redefined and deconstructed this literary category in recent decades, but also to examine what can be regarded as the logics of this literary field.

Löytty (2015) summarizes two central problems that have been embedded in the debates and research on immigrant literature: first, the alleged newness of this literature and, second, the biographical framework affecting the interpretation of literary works. The newness of immigrant literature is intertwined with the notion of imagined multiculturalism since “it would be rather absurd to argue that the literature in any given nation has developed in isolation from other literatures written elsewhere” (54). Therefore, established national literary canons should likewise be seen as constructs that have emerged dialectically with the nation-state. Thus, likewise to the challenges posed by migration to modern nation-states, literature written by immigrants may be seen as posing a challenge to the established boundaries of national literature (Löytty 2015; see also Frank 2010; Grönstrand et al. 2016). The notion of the biographical framework of interpretation refers to the tendency to interpret immigrant literature through the biographical background of certain authors and regard them as authentic voices of a multicultural society. The authenticity of a non-Swedish experience is seen guaranteed thematically by depictions of immigrant
problems or questions of identity, or stylistically by the use of sociolect or “broken” Swedish. For instance, Määttä (2016) notes that the reception of immigrant literature often focuses on linguistic and social hybridity, conceived as markers of authenticity. However, paratextual elements, such as non-Swedish appearance or a foreign-sounding name, contribute to understanding immigrant literature as autobiographical accounts, making stereotypical fiction of the authors’ biographies, and creating othering and exoticizing effects (Kongslien 2005; Nilsson 2010). Consequently, immigrant authors become often de-individualized and regarded as authentic voices for larger, homogenized groups of immigrants (Behschnitt and Nilsson 2013; Gokieli 2017; Rantonen and Savolainen 2010).

Nilsson (2010, 37) writes that in the new millennium the construct of “immigrant literature” has increasingly referred to literature that expresses the author’s ethnicity or “cultural belonging.” Gokieli (2017, 282) further argues that the construct has become synonymous with “non-white.” This given meaning has also been at the center of counter-arguments about the practices of labeling certain types of literature as “immigrant literature” or authors as “immigrant authors.” This has also been “evidenced by, among other things, the fact that not all works written by authors belonging to an ethnic, national, or linguistic minority are labelled ‘multicultural literature’” (Behschnitt and Nilsson 2013, 8–9; see also Trotzig 2005). Most prominently, these protests have been heard in Sweden from authors such as Khemiri and Bakhtiari, but also from an older generation of immigrant authors, such as Greek-born Theodor Kallifatides (Wendelius 2002; Nilsson 2010). However, instead of understanding these protests as “an ideologically motivated protest against the othering, exoticizing, and racializing aspects of the discursive construction of immigrant literature,” they can also be viewed as an expression of conflicts within the literary field (Nilsson 2013, 49). Nilsson (2013) explains that since the emergence of immigrant literature in the 1970s the logic of the literary field has legitimized paratextual elements such as non-Swedish ethnicity as symbolic capital in this literary field. In literature, authenticity should therefore be seen as a literary effect or technique, rather than a qualitative feature of literature.

Concurrently, with the emergence of immigrant literature, interest in working-class literature has also increased in Sweden. Nilsson (2010) notes that this contradicts the notion of ethnicity as the key to understanding contemporary society and, at the same time, demonstrates how class has come to be understood and treated in public as a parallel to ethnicity. This means that instead of being based solely on socio-economic status, the notion of class has become culturalized in line with ethnicity and other categories of cultural identity. However, in many cases, class is overshadowed by the exclusive focus on ethnicity and thus affects how depictions of ethnic otherness become interpreted in the reception of these works. This prevents seeing immigrant literature as also a portrayal of class in Swedish society.
Because of the highly constructivist nature of literary categories, immigrant literature or working-class literature should not be interpreted simply as expressions of ethnic or cultural identity, as these categories are usually defined top-down, reflecting society’s values and ideologies at different times. Hence, labeling specific literature as “immigrant literature” or an author as an “immigrant author” can be considered an indicator of who is considered as the “other” or an outsider in a society, as well as the perceived cultural distance from the majority (see also Gokieli 2017).

“Sweden Finnish Literature” and the Shifting Frames of Interpretation

As previously noted, Sweden Finns were recognized as a national minority in 2000. However, they can also be defined as one of the largest immigrant groups in Sweden (Huss 2001; Lainio 2015). Most of the present-day Finns and Finnish-speakers in Sweden have their background in post-World War II labor migration that, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, resulted in around 250,000 Finns permanently settling in Sweden (Korkiasaari and Tarkiainen 2000). However, in critical debates on immigrant and multicultural literature, older or contemporary Sweden Finnish authors, besides Alakoski, have not been explored in much detail. In contrast, she has been viewed as part of a new generation of working-class authors in Sweden (Jonsson et al. 2010; Nilsson 2010; Williams 2016). This controversy is further exemplified in the almost exclusive emphasis on ethnic identity and notions of Finnishness in other studies on Sweden Finns (see, e.g., Ågren 2006; Weckström 2011). Löytty (2015) identifies the lack of attention given to Sweden Finnish authors in the literary debates and considers Antti Jalava, for instance, as an author who could have been mentioned in discussions of the evolving field of multicultural literature (cf. Kongslien 2005, see also Määttä 2016). This discrepancy could be attributed to the integration process or the changing political status of Finns in Sweden, but the Finnish immigrant experience in Sweden should not be ignored merely because of their contemporary political status. Instead, the Finnish experience and the shifting categorizations reflected in representational practices could provide insight into integration processes. Therefore, taking a closer look at both earlier studies of Sweden Finnish literature as well as the construction of this literary category is important, since this category should not be considered as a fixed entity, but also as a reflection of values and ideologies.

The status of Sweden Finns as a national minority derives not only from a growing awareness of an older Finnish history in Sweden, but also from a unique combination of national, bilateral Finnish Swedish, as well as Nordic cooperation (Elenius 2006; Huss 2001; see also Lainio 1997). Official recognition as a national minority has constructed Sweden Finns

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3 Sweden ratified the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 2000, defining the Jews, the Roma, the Sámi, the Sweden Finns, and the Tornedalians as national minorities and the respective languages Yiddish, Romani chib, Sámi, Finnish, and Meänkieli as minority languages.
as part of the Swedish national history and therefore reshaped the discursive understanding of this group’s location in time and space (Gröndahl 2007; Huss 2001; Silvén 2011). Political recognition by the majority society has, according to Huss (2001), supported the ethnic awakening of the Sweden Finnish minority in the twenty-first century. However, this was not until the 2010s when new symbols, such as the Sweden Finnish flag or Sweden Finnish Day, were introduced, depicting specific minority culture and the awareness of its historical presence in Sweden before the post-World War II migration. This not only depicts the gradual establishment of a specific minority culture deriving from the Swedish context and a growing historical awareness, but it also demonstrates the long process of establishing such a culture and the increasing complexity of referring to Sweden Finns as an immigrant group. On the other hand, this also demonstrates, for its part, the prevailing tendency to dichotomize immigrants and national minorities and, therefore, to indicate those who are considered insiders or outsiders in the national community. As noted by Gröndahl (2007), this is, among other things, visible in the hierarchies that the new field of minority policies has constructed between different groups and cultures.

The apparent essentialization of these categories makes research on Sweden Finns challenging when the collective experiences of migration and historical awareness, as part of the Swedish nation, are simultaneously present. The socio-political changes are exemplified, for instance, by the changing literary categories used in relation to Finnish-born authors in Sweden. Sweden Finnish literature is generally understood as literature written by post-World War II migrants and their descendants. Consequently, studies until the turn of the millennium, such as Pynnönen’s (1991) study of the Sweden Finnish literary field between 1956 and 1988 and Vallenius’s (1998) study of Sweden Finnish literary themes, depict this literature as an expression of otherness and in-betweenness that derives from immigrant experience. In his work on immigrant and minority literature in Sweden between 1970 and 2000, Wendelius (2002) also defines Finns as immigrant authors. He categorizes Sweden Finnish authors partly based on the themes of their literary works, as well as on the biographical framework by noting that “although Finns nowadays have minority status, I regard this group as immigrants mainly because both authors and their characters [...] factually are immigrants” (11, note 5). In her analysis of Swedish immigrant and minority literature, Gröndahl (2002), on the other hand, uses political categories as a reference for literary categorizations and instead defines Finnish authors mainly as minority authors, reflecting their newly attained socio-political status. However, she notes that some groups, such as the Finns and the Jews, can be considered as belonging to both immigrant and national minority groups. Nonetheless, Antti Jalava is positioned as a representative

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4 For instance, the Sweden Finnish Day has been celebrated since 2011 on the birthday of Carl Axel Gottlund, who was a Finnish nineteenth-century historian and collector of Forest Finn folklore in the Swedish province of Värmland.
of “old domestic or regional minorities” in line with Tornedalian authors Gunnar Kieri, Mikael Niemi, and Bengt Pohjanen, Sámi author Inghilda Tapio, and Swedish Romani writer Katarina Taikon (Gröndahl 2002, 36). This demonstrates not only the emerging temporal and spatial shift in the location of Sweden Finnish culture, but also the essentializing tendencies embedded in policy-based categorizations. In some studies, Sweden Finnish literature has also been located between Finnish and Swedish literary fields or even as its own literary category (Kivimäki and Rantonen 2010; Rantonen and Savolainen 2002). Additionally, Grönstrand et al. (2016) note that Sweden Finnish authors are sometimes constructed as part of contemporary Finnish literature. However, these kinds of categorizations are problematic since they tend to emphasize and reify the stability and fixity of national literary canons.

As noted earlier, Alakoski has been depicted foremost as a working-class author in Sweden (Nilsson 2010; Williams 2016). Swedish working-class literature has traditionally been depicted as an expression of working-class experience. Although working-class literature is generally regarded as a central literary phenomenon in the national literature of Sweden, it originated as a political literature mainly within the labor movement (Lennon and Nilsson 2016). Sweden Finnish literature and working-class literature have been noted to have similarities. Sweden Finnishness is generally seen as intertwining with questions of class since Finnish migration to Sweden was largely based on economic reasons and characterized by blue-collar labor (see Korkiasaari and Tarkiainen 2000). Wendelius (2002) mentions the works of Antti Jalava, Hannu Ylitalo, and Martta Matinlompolo, among others, as examples of Finnish immigrant depictions, with particularly clear features of classic working-class novels. Gröndahl (2017), on the other hand, portrays Alakoski and a more recently emerged Sweden Finnish author, Eija Hetekivi Olsson, as part of a renewed Swedish working-class literature in line with Swedish authors such as Åsa Linderborg. Gröndahl explains that this changed literary field builds around criticism of the Swedish welfare state, or the ‘people’s home’ (folkhemmet), and its inability to provide equal opportunities for everyone. This blends the Finnish background and the Finnish language as part of a Swedish working-class depiction. However, Gröndahl notes that this change simultaneously means that class perspective is emerging again in Sweden Finnish literature, demonstrating the overlap of different literary categories. The close connections between ethnicity and class in the case of Sweden Finnish literature align with Melkas and Löytty’s (2016) notions that literature can admit several interpretations. This also means that literature does not necessarily represent only one, coherent societal phenomenon, but it demonstrates that there are also several ways of being in a marginal position in a society.

A closer look at “Sweden Finnish literature” as a construct should include an approach at two levels, regarding the different temporal context of what is regarded as Sweden Finnish culture, as well as from which
cultural context this categorization is derived. First, defining certain works as Sweden Finnish literature without reflecting on the socio-political changes in recent decades would fail to take into consideration that Sweden Finnish literature is given different meanings at different times. For instance, the title of this article and the notion of “Sweden Finnish literature” should not be understood as a fixed category, but rather as a Sweden Finnishness that was constructed from an immigrant perspective in the 1980s, and increasingly from a minority perspective in the 2000s. Second, what should be borne in mind as well is the three central interpretative cultural contexts that literature written by Finnish authors in Sweden have: Finnish, Swedish, and Sweden Finnish contexts. For the Sweden Finnish minority, this specific literary category is part of a process of constructing a collective minority identity (Gröndahl 2002). When looking closer at the Sweden Finnish context of defining this literary category, it is apparent that the construction derives mostly from biographical frameworks of the authors, emphasizing and essentializing Finnish origins and even Finnish-sounding names. For instance, in the two existing anthologies of Sweden Finnish authors published by Sweden Finnish institutions, most of the emphasis seems to be laid on the authors’ Finnish background by framing their representations based on their birthplace in Finland and the year of migration to Sweden (Tikkanen-Rózsa 1995, 2015). The preface to the second anthology also notes that the first edition did not include some Finland Swedish authors since “we Sweden-Finns did not know to perceive [them] as coming from Finland, since they have a Swedish name and they write in Swedish” (2015, 5). However, in addition to the Sweden Finnish minority, the category “Sweden Finnish literature” is used especially in Finnish literature research and in relation to authors such as Alakoski and Jalava (see Kivimäki and Rantonen 2010; Melkas and Löytty 2016). This underlines the importance of paying attention to different cultural contexts of interpretation, since Finnishness has meaning above all, not only for the Sweden Finnish minority, but also for the Finnish audience.

Asfaltblomman and Svinalängorna: Depictions from the Margins of Folkhemmet

Asfaltblomman by Antti Jalava and Svinalängorna by Susanna Alakoski are generally considered to be two of the most well-known literary works by Finnish-born authors in Sweden. The novels are an insightful pair for comparison, since both were written in Swedish and published by Swedish publishing houses in contrast to many other Sweden Finnish novels that have been written in Finnish and published by Sweden Finnish institutions. Additionally, the novels are also thematically alike, both depicting the immigrant experience through the eyes of children and youth. The authors also share a similar background as both of them were born in Finland (Alakoski in 1962 and Jalava in 1949) and subsequently migrated to Sweden as children. Both novels are situated around the same period
and depict the Finnish immigrant experience in Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s. However, written almost three decades apart, these depictions are derived from very different societal and cultural contexts in relation to both Finns’ and immigrants’ position in Swedish society. Still, there is no doubt that both the novels and their authors have a place in the collective Sweden Finnish memory. For instance, in the recent Sweden Finnish anthology *Finnjävlar* (Finnish devils, 2016), minority activist Andreas Ali Jonasson describes reading *Asfaltblomman* as a transformative moment, which reified his sense of collective Finnish experience in Sweden with the depictions of otherness and working-class experiences. Additionally, Susanna Alakoski is generally depicted as a prominent person in Sweden Finnish cultural life (see, e.g., Laestadius 2016). Furthermore, Finnish literature research generally categorizes both as Sweden Finnish authors (see Latomaa 2010; Löytty 2015; Kivimäki and Rantonen 2010; Melkas and Löytty 2016). The reception of both *Asfaltblomman* and *Svinalängorna* has been previously examined (see Nilsson 2010; Pynnönen 1982; Vallenius 1998), but the previous studies have not examined the reception of these novels in comparison to each other or critically dealt with the role of paratextual elements and notions of ethnicity and authenticity.

Deriving from the critical approach to the constructs “immigrant author” and “immigrant literature” and the identified gap in the existing research on Sweden Finnish literature and its reception, the following analysis focuses on the reception of Sweden Finnish literature in Swedish literary reviews. The analysis specially emphasizes authenticity and the role of other paratextual elements in the representation of the authors and their novels. The analysis comprises of eighteen literature reviews of Jalava’s *Asfaltblomman* and Alakoski’s *Svinalängorna* from Swedish daily newspapers; seven reviews of *Asfaltblomman*, published in 1980 and 1981, and eleven reviews of *Svinalängorna*, published in 2006. To highlight the comparative nature of this analysis, the reception of each book is first analyzed independently, and then brought together in the concluding section.

Methodologically, I approach the material with critical discourse analysis (CDA), which emphasizes socio-political consciousness and questions of power in investigating language and discourse. The methodology is useful in analyzing and identifying implicit and underlying meanings produced in media texts as well as in considering the domains where these discourses in the form of public opinions, dominant ideologies, and everyday practices are managed (Van Dijk 1993). CDA is particularly useful when studying discursive practices of mass media since it views media as representations of public space, reflecting the ideologies of the majority as well as socio-cultural changes quite sensitively (Wodak and Busch 2004; see also, e.g., Fairclough 2001). A literary review is a written opinion describing, analyzing, and evaluating a (recently published) book. However, in this article, the focus is on how authors and their literary works are represented and addressed in the literary reviews instead of
how the themes or characters of the novels are discussed. Therefore, my analysis focuses on the more implicit and unconscious representations and categorizations, which I see as being constituted by different temporal, cultural, and socio-political contexts.

Rootless and In-Between: Jalava as the Voice of Immigrant Experience
Antti Jalava’s novel *Asfaltblomman* depicts the life of Finnish immigrant youth in Sweden in the 1970s. The protagonist of the novel is Finnish-born Erkki, who works menial jobs during the day and writes a book during the night. The novel follows a second narrative layer written by Erkki about a Finnish immigrant boy, Hannu, and his struggles to adapt to Sweden. The second protagonist of *Asfaltblomman* is Sirkka, an unemployed and alcoholic woman, whom Erkki meets and tries to help. Through these three characters, the novel depicts the struggle of having an identity crisis between Finnishness and Swedishness, and it reflects the problems that emerge with losing one’s mother tongue and having low self-esteem. Identity, rootlessness, and struggles with language have been depicted as the central themes of *Asfaltblomman* (Vallenius 2002). The novel was a success in Sweden and was even referred to as the literary event of fall 1980, igniting debates on immigrants’ double identity and the loss of their mother tongue and, therefore, opening new perspectives to immigrant issues (Vallenius 1998). *Asfaltblomman* was also translated into Finnish in 1981 by author Pentti Saarikoski, and a movie adaptation of the novel was made for television in 1984. However, among the Finnish community in Sweden, the novel was not much celebrated at the time since many found the thematics of the novel a sore point and did not want to identify with it (Pennanen 1981).

The reception of *Asfaltblomman* in Swedish newspapers shows quite distinctively that the novel was received above all as immigrant literature, following the logics of the field as presented earlier. For instance, Morfiadakis’s (1980) review of *Asfaltblomman* in *Kvällsposten* labels the novel directly as an “immigrant novel about distress and despair” (21). The novel was understood foremost through Jalava’s own Finnish and immigrant background, as depicting experiences of otherness to the Swedish audience. To give a few examples, in a review in *Helsingborgs Dagblad*, Svensson (1980) notes that Jalava was “brought up in southeast Finland outside of Lappeenranta but has since 1959 lived in Sweden.” Additionally, Svensson explains that Jalava’s mother tongue is Finnish but “as so many other immigrants he has been forced to suppress his own language and learn to speak Swedish” (2). Westholm (1981), in *Upsala Nya Tidning*, also frames the review with Jalava’s biographical framework with his move to Sweden as a ten-year-old. Schildt (1980), in *Svenska Dagbladet*, frames his review on *Asfaltblomman* with the title “The second generation” and describes the author as born in Finland but raised in Sweden and, therefore, a spokesperson for “the second generation among immigrants” (12).
The tendency to read *Asfaltblomman* from Jalava’s biographical framework is further exemplified by the portrayals of the novel as an autobiographical account. For example, Löfström (1980), in *Sydsvenskan*, refers to the two-layered storyline of the novel and writes, “both are likely autobiographically grounded” (3). Some reviewers also quote Jalava’s own words from the back cover of *Asfaltblomman* in relation to the characters and themes of the novel. For example, in his portrayal of the main character Erkki, Westholm (1981) writes that “similarly with Antti Jalava, he can say that ‘because of unlucky situations,’ he has chosen Swedish as his literary language” (10). However, Westholm’s review also leaves room to read the title as applying to both Jalava and his literary characters. Löfström (1980) writes that Jalava is “neither a Finn nor a Swede” (3) with notion of his moving to Sweden as a child. Löfström further explains that it is this feeling of not belonging that Jalava’s novel addresses, demonstrating the strong biographical point of departure for the interpretation of the book. Both the titles of Westholm’s review of *Asfaltblomman*—“Neither a Finn nor a Swede”—and Anne Tiefenthal’s (1980) review in *Vestmanlands Läns Tidning*—“To miss roots”—depict a sense of non-belonging and in-betweenness that derives from being uprooted because of migration and the inability to re-root in the Swedish soil. Furthermore, similar notions are found in other reviews, such as Sjöbohm’s (1981) review titled “Strongly on semilingual homelessness” in *Göteborgs-Tidning*, and Svensson’s (1980) “An immigrant tells about his alienation.” As noted earlier, the authenticity of non-Swedish experience is a central feature in the construction of immigrant literature in order to understand it as an authentic depiction of the culturally and ethnically diverse Swedish society. This is also apparent in the reception of *Asfaltblomman* and the ambiguous boundary between reality and *Asfaltblomman’s* literary world. Referring to Jalava, Westholm (1981) notes that “there is no doubt on the authenticity of his depictions of reality” (10). Notions of authenticity are also present in Löfström’s review (1980), which says that Jalava “allows us to see them both outside and through their own eyes” (3). Similarly, Morfiadakis (1980) writes that “it is always interesting to read about immigrants by immigrants” (21).

The notion of authenticity that Jalava is perceived as providing the reader can also be found in references to the style and language of the novel, which were noted earlier as features “guaranteeing” the authenticity of non-Swedish experience. Svensson (1980), for instance, writes first that Jalava is not fluent in any language and points to the occasional errors of grammar he makes in the book, which, however, “only increase the sense of authenticity one experiences when reading” (2). In other reviews, Jalava’s use of language is also discussed. For instance, Löfström (1980) describes Jalava’s language as “rich and nuanced” which he masters with “great confidence.” Additionally, “the tension” and “anger” Löfström finds in Jalava’s use of the Swedish language and his writing style are interpreted as an “emancipation process” that gives the novel
an additional dimension (3). Schildt (1980) also notes that while books about immigrants often have “greater documentary than artistic value,” *Asfaltblomman* is a masterpiece also in terms of its artistic and stylistic value. Schildt, however, notes that Jalava seems to master the Swedish language and storytelling well “with the exception of the difficult prepositions” (12). While the reviewers mostly seem to praise Jalava’s linguistic skills and style, it is quite clear that these factors also affect how the novel is read and interpreted.

The novel is generally depicted as a noteworthy contribution to debates on “immigrant problems” or the “immigrant question” (Westholm 1981; Schildt 1980; Tiefenthal 1980), or as Svensson (1980) describes it, as Jalava’s and “other immigrant children and youth’s bitter experiences of cultural and linguistic oppression in the Swedish welfare state” (2). Sjöbohm (1981) also portrays Jalava as a messenger of essential information on immigrants’ homelessness, their lack of self-esteem, the division between the Swedish and foreign workforce, as well as xenophobia. Jalava, therefore, gives a voice to the immigrant problems that afflict Swedish society. Along these lines, the reception of *Asfaltblomman* reveals a strong tendency to construct and mediate a rather strong, collective “immigrant voice” through Jalava in line with Behschnitt and Nilsson’s (2013) and Gokieli’s (2017) notions of how immigrant authors often become de-individualized. As noted earlier, Schildt (1980) also depicts Jalava as a “spokesperson” for all second-generation immigrants, but in like manner also for Finnish immigrants in Sweden specifically (12). Tiefenthal’s (1980) review additionally shows a strong dichotomization between immigrants, who experience a “lack of power and humiliation,” and “us inborn Swedes,” referring to the different positions of power that “immigrants” and “Swedes” have (4). Interestingly, Tiefenthal also refers to Finns, Assyrians, and Yugoslavs, among others, as “Swedes” with quotation marks signaling the problematic nature of including immigrants in the notion of “Swede.” Svensson (1980) also uses the same us/them dichotomy while noting that “Jalava has succeeded in mediating important knowledge to us inborn Swedes on the difficult problems of immigrants” (2). This notion seems to confirm Nilsson’s (2010) perception of all non-Swedish ethnicity being regarded as the cultural capital in the construction of immigrant literature. At the same time, these notions exemplify quite clearly the marginal position of Finns in Sweden in the early 1980s in line with other immigrant groups.

Although Jalava’s literary production has been noted to include features of classic working-class novels, in the reception of *Asfaltblomman* he was depicted above all through his immigrant background. Schildt’s (1980) review, however, is an exception, commenting that “paradoxically this novel [Asfaltblomman] has made me think of Fridegård’s Lars Hård, who at the time gave voice to experiences of a previously silent social group” (12). Despite noting faint similarities between *Asfaltblomman* and Swedish proletarian writer Lars Fridegård’s literary character Lars Hård,
a farm worker, he finds them contradictory. Although Schildt depicts Jalava as the spokesperson for different ethnic groups, he does not make any further observations on questions of power embedded in both notions of “immigrant” and “class.” It is, however, interesting to find notions of class in *Asfaltblomman*’s reception, since these intertwined notions have been studied closer only in recent decades (see Nilsson 2010). As noted earlier, the character of the new working-class literature can, first and foremost, be viewed as a critique of the Swedish welfare state. However, the similar critique that is acknowledged to exist in *Asfaltblomman* is constructed explicitly as an account of immigrant experience and not as a self-reflection on prevailing societal structures.

The way *Asfaltblomman* was received in the 1980s has striking similarities with, for example, how Jonas Hassen Khemiri’s celebrated debut novel *Ett öga rött* (*An Eye Red*, 2003) was received two decades later (Thompson 2005). Khemiri’s novel was initially interpreted as immigrant literature, although the novel was later noted to include several contrary metafictional notions and even irony toward the construction of immigrant literature. Nilsson’s (2010) analysis of the reception of *Ett öga rött* shows that Khemiri’s biographical background as Swedish Tunisian likewise affected the way the novel was read: Khemiri was also portrayed as representing a larger, homogenized group of immigrants despite having in fact been born in Sweden. Among other authors, Khemiri opposed strongly being labeled as an immigrant author. Interestingly, the same notion can also be found in Jalava’s case. After the success that followed *Asfaltblomman*, Jalava declared in many contexts that he did not identify as an immigrant author, nor as a Finnish author, or even as a Sweden Finnish author (Pennanen 1981; Pynnönen 1982). For instance, in *Asfaltblomman*’s review in the Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*, Jalava stated that he was planning to move on to new themes since he did not want to “receive a name tag of an immigrant writer” (Pennanen 1981, 28). According to Pynnönen (1982), Jalava did not want to identify as a Sweden Finnish author either, since he saw Sweden Finnishness as narrow and limiting. This notion, in many ways, is in line with the meanings of marginality and in-betweenness that were attached in the 1980s to the idea of Sweden Finnishness as a depiction of immigrant experience rather than a specific minority identity (see, e.g., Hujanen 1986).

The critical analysis of the reception of *Asfaltblomman* is in many ways in line with what Nilsson (2013, 53) refers to as the “standard description of immigrant novel,” following the logic of the construction of “immigrant literature.” The reception of the novel shows a strong tendency to homogenize ethnic groups, both immigrants and Swedes. Additionally, the emphasis on linguistic style and other paratextual elements in the reception of *Asfaltblomman* demonstrates the ambiguity of the line between literary fiction and the author’s own biographical background. Instead of his Finnish background, Jalava’s general experience as an immigrant, however, seems to play a more central role in the interpretation of
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the novel. *Asfaltblommman* was seen above all as an authentic depiction of immigrant or non-Swedish experience in Swedish society and as a contribution to debates on society’s problems and questions related to immigrants. The reception portrays Jalava as not belonging to the given national context even as a second-generation immigrant. In general, the reception also underscores the perceived inability of including immigrant experience in Swedishness.

**Invisible Ethnicity and Changing Notions of Class: Alakoski as a Voice for Social Exclusion**

Susanna Alakoski’s debut novel *Svinalängorna* is situated in a suburb of Fridhem in Swedish Ystad in the 1960s and 1970s. The novel depicts the coming-of-age story of Leena, a young Finnish girl, and follows, through her eyes, the life of her Finnish immigrant family as it struggles with poverty, alcoholism, and violence. Leena’s family moved from Finland to Fridhem when she was six years old. The locals soon start to call the suburb *svinalängorna*, the pig houses or swine rows, because of the immigrants and low-income earners who are moving into the area. However, in Ystad, Leena’s family has a modern apartment, her parents work, and Leena starts to learn a new language. However, bit by bit, the family idyll starts to break as the parents’ alcohol use increases. Like *Asfaltblommman*, *Svinalängorna* has been portrayed as handling questions of integration, social problems, and identity, along with gender, class differences, and children’s experience of immigrant life (Gröndahl 2008). The novel was a success in Sweden and stimulated discussions of poverty and the meaning of class in the Swedish welfare state. It later became seen as a central part of the emerging Swedish debate on class with Alakoski as part of a new generation of working-class authors (Kivimäki and Rantonen 2010; Nilsson 2010; Williams 2016). The novel also won the prestigious literary ‘August prize’ (*Augustpriset*) in 2006, and a movie adaptation based on the novel was released four years later. Although notions of ethnicity and nationality have been identified as somewhat relevant in *Svinalängorna*, the notion of class has been argued to be more meaningful and, in fact, the key to understanding the novel. For instance, Nilsson (2010) argues that the depiction of Finnishness in the novel is heterogeneous and unstable, which makes it problematic as the sole point of departure for interpretation. As noted before, *Svinalängorna* has also been identified as part of the Sweden Finnish literary field, for instance in Gröndahl’s (2017) depiction of it as part of a continuum of Sweden Finnish working-class literature.

The reception of *Svinalängorna* in Swedish media shows that both class and ethnicity were noted in the reception of the novel, although ethnicity was more marginal in comparison. Sarrimo (2006) in *Sydsvenskan* reads the story of *Svinalängorna* most prominently through ethnicity and, at the same time, she is among the few reviewers who emphasize Alakoski’s own ethnic background. In her review, Sarrimo depicts the Finnish experience in the past century as characterized by war and the “subsequent need for
patriotism” and explains that of all this “Alakoski gives her own personal version” (B5). Sarrimo’s notion does not define Alakoski directly as a Finn or someone with an immigrant background. Instead, she describes the novel as Alakoski’s personal version of Finnishness, as opposed to a general or collective account of Finnishness in Sweden. Dahlman (2006) in Falu Kuriren also defines Alakoski within a similar frame by writing that “both Alakoski and Leena have Finnish parents who have immigrated to Scania”; however, Dahlman leaves additional similarities between the author and her literary character “for the reader to evaluate” (B12). In Svenska Dagbladet, Löfvendahl (2006) mentions ethnicity rather as an undertone by beginning his review by wondering if “otherness or the feeling of rootlessness that derive from having roots in another land is the best breeding ground for literary fiction” (9). As examples, Löfvendahl mentions Swedish authors Astrid Trotzig and Sofia French, who have both been adopted from South Korea, and Zbigniew Kuklarz, who has Polish parents; however, Löfvendahl implies Alakoski’s background only by speculating that the protagonist Leena might be Alakoski’s alter ego. Löfvendahl, therefore, mediates a rather strong awareness of Alakoski’s background but does not evoke any further autobiographical interpretations. In a sense, referring to other authors with a foreign background does, however, construct a certain experience of otherness and non-belonging, which in turn also affects the interpretation of Alakoski’s novel. In contrast, many reviewers—such as Aftonbladet’s Bromander (2006), for example—do not place any emphasis on Alakoski or her background, but only portray her as the author of the novel.

Instead of depicting Alakoski as a voice for a collective group of immigrants, the reviews, on the contrary, show a conscious awareness of the problematic nature of homogenizing ethnic groups. For example, both Bjelvehammar (2006) in Ystads Allehanda and Thente (2006) in Dagens Nyheter criticize previous practices of viewing immigrants as collective units, through prejudices or collective models of integration. Thente (2006), for instance, writes about old stereotypes of immigrants such as knife-fighting Finns who “together with some Chileans and Greek [. . .] were The Other, who could be lumped together with prejudices” (5).

Although some autobiographical references are found in the reviews, the notion of authenticity does not refer particularly to being someone with a Finnish or immigrant background in Sweden, but rather to the authenticity and experience of growing up in poverty shadowed by alcoholism and violence. For example, both Johansson (2006) in Västerviks-Tidningen and Kvist (2006) in Smålandsposten emphasize class and social exclusion in their reviews of Svinalängorna. Johansson (2006) considers the novel as an autobiographical account despite the fact that “the author has said in an interview that the novel is not autobiographical although she has had a similar childhood.” Johansson doubts any other alternatives since narrating the story as Alakoski has done it “must be more or less self-experienced” (10). Kvist (2006) also discusses the novel as an account
of Alakoski’s own life since the buildings depicted on the cover of the novel might, according to Kvist, be from Alakoski’s own personal photo albums.

While Alakoski uses sociolect and, for instance, Finnish swear words as a stylistic feature in the novel (see, e.g., Määttä 2016), this stylistic feature that is generally seen as implying authenticity in immigrant literature does not seem to affect the reception or categorization of *Svinalängorna* or Alakoski. Instead, Kvist (2006) writes that Alakoski “adds flavor with Finnish expressions” (27). Language is of less focus in the reviews in general. Where authenticity and language are discussed, it is in reference to other perspectives than ethnicity as, for instance, in Bjelvehammar’s (2006) notion of Alakoski writing “with authenticity and vigor” from a child’s point of view, “from below” as well as praising women (B20). In comparison to both reviews of *Asfaltblomman* and contemporary discussions of the constructs “immigrant literature” and “immigrant author,” this observation seems to suggest that the notion of authenticity derives more readily from outside the book, from the paratextual elements, instead of the thematic or stylistic features of the work. At the same time, this also reifies Nilsson’s (2010) and Gokieli’s (2017) argument of the contemporary construct “immigrant author” being exoticized and racialized, since Alakoski and her novel do in many other ways fit the description of “immigrant author” and “immigrant literature.”

How are Alakoski and *Svinalängorna* then represented in the reviews if not with reference to ethnicity and migrancy? Bjelvehammar (2006) summarizes the predominant discourse present in many other reviews by portraying the “immigrant families and low-income earners” of the book as “second class citizens” (B20). This frequent portrayal emphasizes the reception of the novel not merely as an account of living as an immigrant in Sweden, but rather as a depiction of class, class differences, and those who fall outside of society—of “the poor and the outcast,” as Dahlman (2006, B12) expresses it. This is also exemplified in Lundberg’s (2006) review in *Helsingborgs Dagblad*, in which he acknowledges class hatred and the social climb (“klassresa” [class trip]), which rises from suburbs that “are slowly filled with immigrants and low-income earners” (A35). Class and immigration intertwine in many reviews, reifying what was noted earlier in relation to both immigrant literature and Sweden Finnish literature. Löfvendahl (2006) is the only one to discuss this notion more deeply with reference to Swedish author Tony Samuelsson, who has paid attention to the changing nature of working-class literature and noted how it “more often emerges from immigrant neighborhoods among the indigent and unemployed than among sons and daughters of labor.” Löfvendahl argues that Alakoski’s literary alter ego allows her to have “the perspective of a modern working-class author” (9) by depicting those who seemingly have no chances in life. Löfvendahl illustrates the changing nature of working-class literature by referring to a Swedish working-class author Ivar-Lo Johansson, whose previous depictions of farm-workers, likewise, gave voice to those who were on the lowest rung of society.
Kvist (2006), on the other hand, writes more directly that Alakoski “has taken place among working-class authors and shows that the genre did not die with Moa Martinson” (27), another Swedish author who depicted working-class experiences. This also illustrates how the alleged changing nature of working-class literature with its intertwining notions of class and migrancy has been adopted quite naturally.

Reading *Svinalängorna* as a depiction of class seems to construct the experience of immigration, and especially Finnishness as part of Swedishness, which did not come across in *Asfaltblomman*’s reviews. By contrast, *Asfaltblomman*’s reception emphasized otherness and social exclusion. In *Svinalängorna*’s reception, these experiences are constructed not only as shared memories of Swedish society in the 1960s and 1970s, but also as depictions of the present time, constructing a very different Sweden than a few decades earlier. The role of Finnish immigrants in Swedish history is indicated in Nyström’s (2006) review in *Norrbottens-Kuriren* with the notion of a “Sweden that in the 1960s builds welfare with Finnish immigrants” (22), referring to the role of Finnish workers in Swedish industry in the decades of high economic growth. In Johansson’s (2006) review, *Svinalängorna* is also portrayed as a depiction of “the contemporary Sweden,” referring to the previously discussed imagined multiculturality, which starts to emerge through immigration during these decades (10). Similarly, Planhammar (2006) describes the novel as an authentic depiction of “the emergence of modern Sweden” (78).

The analysis of *Svinalängorna*’s reception contrasts sharply with that of *Asfaltblomman*. Although authenticity appears as a central tool in interpreting *Svinalängorna*, it is sought more readily through the class experience than through ethnicity. This is also exemplified by the reviewers’ highly contrasted way of interpreting *Asfaltblomman*’s and *Svinalängorna*’s authenticity based on linguistic features. *Svinalängorna* is interpreted predominantly as a depiction of poverty, violence, and otherness. However, instead of being understood only as deriving from socio-economic factors, the analysis shows the strong entanglements between notions of class and ethnicity as portrayers of social exclusion. This notion implies that Alakoski is not portrayed as a representative of her ethnic or immigrant background because this interpretative context alone is not sufficient for the Swedish audience. The novel is rather understood as a description of Swedish society for which class offers a more fitting context. As noted earlier, constructing white immigrants from Nordic countries as “immigrants” has decreased in recent decades and, subsequently, the emphasis has shifted increasingly to racialized ethnicities. Therefore, class might also function as a more suitable lens to understand the Finnish experience and its expressions in Swedish society. Class, thus, shows also how Finnishness has increasingly been integrated as a part of Swedishness in only a few decades. This is also in line with Gröndahl’s (2017) notion of Finnishness being constructed as part of Swedish working-class depictions. Ethnicity is, however, not
absent in Alakoski’s representations, although not remarkably affecting the interpretation of the novel. Therefore, ethnicity in Alakoski’s case could be described as invisible. Last, while the reviews of *Svinalängorna* partially emphasize individuality instead of seeing immigrants as collective, homogenous groups, Alakoski is, to some extent, portrayed as a representative of her class position and, therefore, a voice for the more diverse experiences of otherness.

**Concluding Remarks**

In this article, I have discussed the reception of Sweden Finnish literature in Swedish newspapers as well as different temporal and cultural contexts of interpretation that affect literary categorizations. Overall, I have pointed out the importance of the highly constructivist and fluid nature of literary categories, which emerge as reflections of society’s values and ideologies at different times. Literary categories should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather as expressions of the different cultural, societal, or political objectives that they serve in different cultural and temporal contexts. National literary fields as extensions of hegemonic national identities offer restricted interpretative frames for studying transcultural and multispatial literature such as Sweden Finnish literature and, therefore, continue to produce othering and exoticizing representations. Despite the many similarities with the more recent practices of how “immigrant literature” and “immigrant author” are constructed, the reception of *Asfaltblomman* in the early 1980s demonstrates that meanings attached to these categories have changed. Instead of being regarded as literature depicting all immigrant and non-Swedish experience, exoticizing and racializing notions have increasingly been positioned in the center of this construction. This conclusion is further reified by how Alakoski was not constructed as an immigrant author in the reviews of *Svinalängorna*. This means that the mere experience of immigrating to Sweden, or even thematic or stylistic choices of the literary work, do not mean that a specific novel would be necessarily perceived as “immigrant literature.” Instead, the construct reflects prevailing ideologies and fundamentally reveals who is considered as belonging or not belonging to Swedishness.

“Sweden Finnish literature” should likewise be viewed as a construction with different meanings in different temporal and cultural contexts. For the Sweden Finnish minority, it is a tool to construct collective minority identity. Whereas the use of this construct emphasizes meanings of Finnishness also for the Finnish audience, it has become less meaningful for the Swedish audience. The meaning of Finnishness as an immigrant experience does not bear the same meaning in Sweden today as it did in the 1980s when Finns, like other immigrants, were depicted as the outsiders of a society exemplified in the literary reviews of *Asfaltblomman*. Finnish experience in the 1980s was, therefore, meaningful to the Swedish audience above all as a depiction of otherness—from an immigrant perspective. Today this perspective, in addition to the exoticizing and racializing
aspects of the discursive construction of immigrant literature, does not seem to exist anymore since it does not provide the Swedish audience a meaningful context for interpreting novels such as *Svinalängorna*. Instead, in the Swedish context, class provides a more suitable interpretative context for Sweden Finnish literature, visible for instance in the perceptions of collective memories of Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, the notion of class has been changing, becoming increasingly culturalized in line with the notion of ethnicity as experiences of otherness that derive from an outcast status in the society. The fact that the class thematic seemed to be paradoxical in the reception of *Asfaltblomman*—but central in understanding *Svinalängorna*—suggests that the shifting meaning of class with its intertwined notions of migrancy is also important in understanding integration processes that transform voices from the outside of the society to voices from within the society. This, however, results in Alakoski and Jalava both being still constructed as voices for otherness and as critical commentators of the welfare state and its deficiencies, although through shifting frames of interpretation.

Both the conclusions of this study and the changing socio-political status of Sweden Finns show a rapid integration process of Finns in Sweden. This integration process has taken place only during the past two decades. Although some notions of Finnishness were visible in the reception of *Svinalängorna*, Finnishness was represented through migrancy rather than as a collective minority culture in Sweden, following the political recognition of Sweden Finns as a national minority. However, the analysis indicates a similar trend toward the construction of Finnishness in Sweden as a more integral part of Swedishness, although overshadowed here by class. This contemporary gaze, including an awareness of their political status as well as the emphasis on class, might also explain why even older Finnish-born authors have not been included in contemporary discussions on “immigrant authors” and “immigrant literature.” This study shows that authors such as Jalava can contribute to understanding the highly constructivist nature of this literary category.

This study is limited to the reception of two Sweden Finnish novels. With the introduction of historical awareness as a more integral part of contemporary Sweden Finnish culture and collective identity, it will be interesting to observe how this awareness may also affect the construction of Sweden Finnish literature in the future.
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