

ABSTRACT

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VIHTORI KOSONEN AND THE FIELD OF EARLY FINNISH WORKING-CLASS LITERATURE

Working-class publishing during the time of the so-called old working-class movement in Finland is still a notably under-researched part of the Finnish literary field. So far, only the biggest and perhaps the most important working-class publishing house of the time, Työväen Sanomalehti-Osakeyhtiö, has been the subject of a detailed study, and a comprehensive research of Finnish labour publishing as a whole is yet to be made. Studying the field might, however, offer new insights to for example the ideological formation of the working-class movement and the transnational influences in the Finnish literary culture of the time.

My research has focused on one of the actors of the field, Vihtori Kosonen, whose most prolific years in the trade were 1907–1910. During this short period he published around eighty titles originating from ten different countries, ranging from fiction, poetry, plays to theoretical works on e.g. socialism and education. The original authors under his wing included famous Finnish writers such as Arvid Järnefelt and L. Onerva, as well as less-known names such as Anni Kaste and Fanny Davidson. As translations Kosonen published titles from e.g. Leo Tolstoy and Friedrich Engels. Nordic authors featured in Kosonen's publications were Ellen Key, Johan Bergman, Carl Konow, Troels Lund, Victor Hugo Wickström and Karl af Geijerstam.

In my paper, I will examine the role of Kosonen's company in the field of Finnish working-class publishing. Through a short biography of Kosonen, I will appraise his relationship to the working-class movement and the ideological influences behind his publishing policy. Then, by analysing his company's output, I will highlight his role in mediating international and especially Nordic influences to Finnish working-class readers and thus enriching the field of Finnish working-class literature. Third, as a conclusion, I will analyse Kosonen's status as a working-class publisher and the question of the boundaries of working-class literature in early 20th century Finland.