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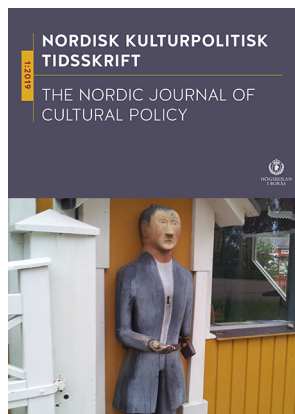
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RESEARCH PUBLICATION

# Crossing the Magical Barriers of Art: Social Class, Authorship and Capital in the Contemporary Finnish Literary Field

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines how social class origin is experienced to affect the trajectories of becoming and being an author in the context of the contemporary Finnish literary field. It analyzes authors' experiences of social class, artistic work and authorship in a theoretical framework that draws from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Beverley Skeggs, particularly the concepts of economic and cultural capital, habitus and inscription. Social class origin is argued to be a relevant factor that affects the ways authorship is pursued even in a country, such as Finland, where artistic labor is relatively well supported by the public sector. The results show that authors from upper middle-class, academic middle-class and cultural families generally felt themselves safe to pursue the risky profession of authorship. Authors from lower middle-class and working-class origins often experienced feelings of outsidership and not-belonging, as their personal habitus was considered to be “out of sync” with the literary field. The empirical research material of this article consists of authors' written experiences of artistic work, social class and gender. The data were collected in 2018 and analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

## Keywords

Artistic work | authorship | cultural capital | economic capital | literary field | social class

## INTRODUCTION

The conception that pure talent and excellence lead to artistic success has been a persistent idea in the field of cultural production. Especially the arts – literature included – poses a particular challenge for the analysis of social class and other structural issues because it has traditionally been connected to the “glorification of ‘great individuals’” and “unique creators” (Bourdieu 1993: 29). This idea of individualized labor (Banks & Hesmondhalgh 2009) has often been

named as one of the core reasons that makes inequality in the artistic and creative industries a challenging issue to address (e.g. Gill 2002; Gill 2014; Scharff 2018). This phenomenon has also been handled in terms of the “talent ideology” prevalent in the arts, under which structural issues of inequality easily become overlooked (Nochlin 1971; Flisbäck 2014). One such form of structural inequality is related to social class.

Taking risks – both economic and artistic ones – can be seen as a prerequisite for creative action of any kind. It has been claimed that the possibility to not only enter but also to stay in these risky positions is largely the privilege of those who possess a sufficient amount of the right kinds of capital to balance those risks – not solely in terms of economic resources, but cultural, social and symbolic capital as well (Bourdieu 1993; Flisbäck 2006; Flisbäck 2014). Marita Flisbäck (2014: 55) has called this “venture capital”, referring to “an additional stock of resources that can provide one with basic security”. In other words, there are certain shared occupational challenges (see Friedman, O’Brien & Laurison 2016) that are common for all writers, but which are encountered differently based on, for example, social class. As Sofia Lindström (2016: 59) suggests, “[b]eing self-reliant involves being able to navigate insecurity and uncertainty”.

It is known that writers from middle-class origins or so-called cultural families have traditionally dominated the literary field in Finland (Heikkinen 1989). Cultural and artistic professions have generally been noted to be strongly inheritable (Myrskylä 2009; Piispa & Salasuo 2014). In Sweden, artists more often tend to come from highly educated families than the rest of the population (Konstnärsnämnden 2016). Among visual art students in Sweden, for instance, the proportion of those coming from working-class origins is around 10 to 15 percent (Flisbäck 2014). In the UK, people coming from privileged class origins are clearly overrepresented in the cultural and creative industries, especially in publishing,<sup>1</sup> in addition to which class origin also has an influence on the career trajectories after entering the field in aspects such as class pay gap (O’Brien et al. 2016).

Social class has been said to have “re-emerged in Finnish literature” at the turn of the millennium (Ojajärvi 2015: 181), in addition to which there has been a growing interest in the relations between literature and society in general (see e.g. Ruohonen et al. 2011; Ojajärvi et al. 2018). In cultural policy research, issues related to inequality have been gaining a foothold, especially as they relate to questions such as participation, accessibility and sexual harassment. Despite

1. The publishing industry as referred to here consists of two categories: (1) authors, writers and translators, and (2) journalists and editors of newspapers and periodicals. Of the group of authors, writers and translators, 47% come from a higher professional or managerial background (O’Brien et al. 2016.) On a more general note, cultural and creative industries cannot be straightforwardly compared to artistic professions, since they refer to a much wider range of fields. The gaming industry, for instance, follows a different kind of logic than the literary field does. Yet there are common features between fields in the artistic, cultural and creative sector in relation to questions of inequality, such as the tendency to emphasize individual talent or success and egalitarian ideals instead of structural forms of inequality.

these developments, questions related to authorship and social class have remained beyond scrutiny. The interest in social class has been often directed at the level of texts and how class relations are represented in literary works (e.g. Ojajärvi 2016), or when addressing working-class literature, it is often framed from a historical perspective (e.g. Hyttinen & Launis 2017). At the moment, there exists no up-to-date information about the class composition of authors or other artists in Finland (for the most recent quantitative analysis, see Heikkinen 1989). Some authors have shared their class experiences in their literary works as well as in interviews and other media appearances (e.g. Tapanainen 2013; Dahlbom 2018; Vaarala 2019), but there is still a lack of qualitative research on the ways class affects authorship in the contemporary Finnish literary field.

In this article, the issue of class is approached from a qualitative perspective by asking what it means to be from a working-class, middle-class or any other class origin and to be an author in 21st-century Finland, a country with a relatively strong public sector and an extensive support system for literature. Previous research on the status of artists and writers in Finland has been closely connected to questions of income (see Rensujeff 2014; Grönlund 2018), so this study contributes to the existing literature by focusing not solely on monetary resources, but also fundamentally on questions of cultural capital. Based on these premises, I ask the following research questions: How do contemporary writers in Finland experience their possibilities of becoming and being authors in relation to their social class origin? How are these experiences shaped by their possession of economic and cultural capital? The qualitative analysis is based on the authors' experiences of social class, gender and artistic work, which were collected in written form in spring 2018. The data are analyzed in the framework of qualitative content analysis.

## THE STATUS OF AUTHORS IN FINLAND

As an art form, literature has historically been connected to the construction of the nation state and the formation of national identity. The prestigious status given to literature has also been reflected in the status of authors, which has been noted to be special in comparison to other artists (Jokinen 2002; Ojajärvi & Työlähti 2017). Authors – especially novelists and fiction authors – have been seen as having a special status in relation to arts funding, mainly because of the abundance of funding instruments.<sup>2</sup> Despite the relatively strong support systems for literature in Finland, the economic status of authors is still in many

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2. In addition to the artist grants awarded by the Arts Promotion Centre Finland, of which 17 percent are given to authors (Karhunen, forthcoming), writers can also apply for grants from a special funding instrument, designed especially for authors and translators (Jokinen 2002; Arts Promotion Centre). In addition to these artist grants and subsidies, since 2007 authors have also been entitled to compensation based on the amount that their books are loaned from public libraries ("loan compensation"). Furthermore, grants for artistic work are also awarded by private foundations, such as the Kone Foundation and the Finnish Cultural Foundation.

respects precarious, mostly because their income comes from several different sources. The annual median income that authors gain from solely artistic work, such as book sales and copyrights, was less than 2,500 euros per year in 2017. Other sources of income include grants and arts-related activities, such as appearance fees and teaching payments, and to a larger extent from non-arts related work; in Finland, the latter is the case with 39 percent of all unionized authors. (Grönlund 2018.) When all different sources of subsistence are considered, the median income of authors in Finland was 28,758 euros in 2010.<sup>3</sup>

In the general European context, working conditions in artistic occupations and cultural industries are often described as precarious: working patterns are typically project-based and insecure, the pay is low or in many cases nonexistent, yet the competition is harsh and often mentally draining (e.g. Gill & Pratt 2008; Gielen 2015; Lindström 2016). Also in Finland, the working conditions in the arts have become increasingly insecure (Rensujeff 2014). The economic conditions of authorship have also been discussed by authors themselves throughout Finnish literary history. One recent example of such discussion is the monologue *Häviö* [Destruction] written by Antti Nylén, a prominent Finnish essayist, in 2018, in which authorship is compared to begging. In light of these precarious conditions of pursuing a career as a writer, it can be assumed that managing these risky positions is easier for those who come from a wealthy social background and who therefore have a sufficient amount of so-called venture capital. Indeed, even in the 1980s, the so-called golden era of the Nordic welfare state, writers coming from middle class or upper middle-class origins were clearly overrepresented in the body of Finnish authors (Heikkinen 1989). The claim by Brook, O'Brien and Taylor in the UK context of how "there was no 'golden age' for social mobility" in the arts and cultural sector (Brook et al. 2018a; Brook et al. 2018b) seems to hold up for the Finnish literary field as well.

Regardless of the precarious conditions of authorship and the presumed overrepresentation of middle-class authors, there has also been a strong tradition of working-class literature in Finland and other Nordic countries (e.g. Hyttinen & Launis 2017; Nilsson 2017). However, the mere definition of what constitutes working-class literature or a working-class author has been debated. Is it, for instance, literature that is simply written by working-class writers, or does it have to be "by, about and for workers" (Nilsson 2017, 95)? Paradoxically, some of the most prominent authors who are often seen as part of the tradition of working-class literature have been from upper social class origins (Hyttinen & Launis 2017; Nilsson 2017). This supports the idea that at times working-class literature can be an issue related to taking a specific kind of political stance or handling a specific theme rather than defined by the class origin of the author. It also feels symptomatic that when considering the literary endeavours of the working classes, these aspirations are easily connected to political statements instead of to aesthetic quality.

3. In 2010, the overall median income of the Finnish population was 24,257 euros (Official Statistics Finland).

## FORMATION OF SOCIAL CLASS: CAPITAL, HABITUS AND INSCRIPTION

In this study, social class is approached as a productive power structure, one which is lived through in people's personal lives and experiences, and by that, affecting their possibilities for action. In line with the definition by Pierre Bourdieu, classes are thought to be formed in the interplay of four kinds of capital: economic, cultural, social and symbolic (Bourdieu 2010/1984; Bourdieu 1987; Skeggs 1997).<sup>4</sup>

Economic capital refers to financial and monetary income, wealth, assets and inheritance; basically anything "which is immediately and directly convertible into money" (Bourdieu 1986: 281; Skeggs 1997). In a capitalist society, economic capital self-evidently affects one's positioning in the social world. However, in the arts, which Bourdieu has characterized as the "economic world reversed", the symbolic role of economic capital differs from the role it usually carries in other spheres of society. The literary field values "disinterestedness" and disavowal of economic issues, because this is thought to strengthen the autonomy of the field. However, as noted by Bourdieu, not all actors in the field have the resources to ignore economic realities, and by extension, to value disinterestedness. (Bourdieu 1993.)

Cultural capital has three potential forms: the embodied state, that is, "the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body"; the objectified state, which is manifested in the possession of cultural goods; and the institutionalized state, concretized in, for example, educational qualifications (Bourdieu 1986: 281). In the broad understanding of the term followed in this article, cultural capital can be seen as including "adaptive cultural and social competencies", including familiarity with field-specific contexts and the "possession of relevant intellectual and social skills" (Edgerton & Roberts 2014: 4; Lareau & Weininger 2003). In its embodied form, cultural capital refers to a set of accumulated knowledge, factors and practices of culture and cultivation that become inscribed in the bodies of their bearers and represented in the habitus.

Embodied cultural capital essentially needs time to build up, and it requires personal investments from the people acquiring it. Since gaining embodied cultural capital requires time, those born into families with sufficient amounts of cultural capital get a head start, because they are able to begin acquiring it early on<sup>5</sup> (Bourdieu 1986; Lareau 2015). As a consequence, those who have not had access to similar kinds of resources as those from "cultural families" can experience feelings of unworthiness, outsidership or inadequacy. This has often been shown to be the case with people who have experienced social mobility, such as working-class people in art and the cultural sector or in aca-

4. Social capital refers to networks, group memberships and other social relationships, or capital that is formed through these relationships (Bourdieu 1986). Symbolic capital can refer to any form of capital in its legitimate form (Bourdieu 2013; Skeggs 1997).
5. For this reason, in this article class is operationalized in terms of class origin instead of current class status.

demia (e.g. Lawler 1999; Käyhkö 2014; Friedman et al. 2016; Scharff 2018). Capital also has an accumulative tendency (Bourdieu 1986). Economic capital enables freedom from necessity, and social capital helps to direct one towards symbolically profitable positions (Bourdieu 1999/1983). In Bourdieu's words (1993: 170), it is "money that assures freedom from money", thereby enabling a person to invest time to acquire cultural capital.

Capital is therefore not just separate and randomly formed features or resources that a person possesses, but it rather works as embodied practices, inscribed to the bodies of their bearers and linked to their class status and origin (Skeggs 2004). This embodiment can also be understood in terms of the habitus. Edgerton and Roberts (2014: 3) describe Bourdieu's conception of the habitus as "the learned set of practices or dispositions by which a person orients to the social world." Habitus is constructed in the interplay of material reality and the self. As Bourdieu writes, class habitus is "the internalized form of class condition and of the conditionings it entails" (Bourdieu 2010: 95). In *Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu defines habitus as "embodied history" (Probyn 2004: 229), emphasizing the temporal aspect of the concept. People who experience class mobility or other forms of social transformation can end up in different surroundings than those in which their habitus was originally formed, and therefore can experience feeling "out of sync" with their field (Aarseth et al. 2016; Bourdieu 2000). The habitus, in other words, is a useful concept for the analysis of embodied formations of class, as is the case in this article.

However, the conception of habitus has certain limitations and it has also been criticized for its tendency to downplay individual action. According to Aarseth et al. (2016: 150–151), "Bourdieu's theory does not capture the ways in which [...] 'constant negotiations' might constitute an embodied, subjective driving force toward change." Instead, the conception of habitus can too easily lead to the nurturing of victimhood. Yet this shortage can be overcome with the concept of inscription in the way it is used and understood by Beverly Skeggs. Skeggs' understanding of inscription resembles Bourdieu's definition of the habitus, with the exception that it emphasizes the role of individual agency. For Skeggs,

[i]nscription is about making through marking. Inscription cuts or scars bodies in the process of assembling them into composite forms, segments, strata and habitual modes of behaviour. Class is a form of inscription that shapes bodies in the making of strata and behaviour. (Skeggs 2004: 12.)

Inscription has a pivotal role in the construction of subjectivities and social class. However, despite the violent-sounding processes of cutting and scarring, inscription is not portrayed as a fatalistic destiny. By contrast, declining the given inscription functions as the possibility to change the whole symbolic order of things, thereby carrying a radical potential (Skeggs 2004). In other words, refusal is possible, and through it, new forms of action and ways of understanding in this case of authorship can be developed.

## DATA AND METHODS

The research material of this article consists of authors' written experiences of social class, gender and artistic work ( $N = 47$ ). The material was collected through an open writing invitation in spring 2018. The writing invitation was circulated via authors' associations such as the Union of Finnish Writers, as well as social media channels. Participants received written guidelines to write their responses, in which they were instructed to write about their experiences of gender, social class and artistic work with the help of auxiliary questions appointed by the researcher. All responses were received in Finnish apart from one in Swedish, and they have been translated into English by the author.

The research participants are a heterogeneous group in their demographics and their literary careers and genres. Two-thirds of the respondents (33) identify as women or women / gender fluid, and the rest (14) as men. Respondents' age distribution is described below in Table 1.

**TABLE 1. AGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS**

Under 40 years old	16 respondents
41 to 50	13
51 to 60	10
61 to 70	4
Over 70	4

Defining the class origin of the respondents is a more difficult task to perform than defining age or gender distributions. In the data collection, respondents described their parents' occupations and presumed class position. In addition, some respondents talked about their parents' educational level. Using all the information available, I labeled the class origin of the respondents as upper middle class, academic middle class / cultural families, (lower) middle class and working class (see Table 2). The categorization roughly reflects the Erikson Goldthorpe class scheme (see e.g. Anttila et al. 2016), meaning that the process of categorization emphasizes parents' occupation. The way the respondents discussed class origin varied significantly. Despite the variation, only one respondent provided so little information about his origin that he could not be placed into this categorization.

The categorization presented in Table 2 should be read as a suggestive framing, which gives an overview of the respondents' class origins rather than an unambiguous truth. Some respondents' class origin was equivocal, and they could have been categorized into more than one group. As the data used in this study do not enable any kind of mechanical categorization of the respondents' class origins, the class origin of each respondent has been considered individually and can, therefore, be debated.



TABLE 2. CLASS ORIGIN OF RESPONDENTS

Class origin	Examples of parents' occupations	Respondents in this group <sup>6</sup>
Upper middle class (N = 6)	economist, entrepreneur, judge, manager, physicist	Joona, Maria, Martta, Minja, Minna, Pekka
Academic middle class, cultural families (N = 9)	author, engineer, civil servant, journalist, teacher	Anni, Arja, Kaarina, Kari, Karoliina, Leena, Mikko, Niina, Raili, Tapani
(Lower) middle class (N = 10)	bank clerk, cosmetologist, photographer, public health nurse, sales clerk, small entrepreneur	Antero, Hanna, Heidi, Jaana, Laura, Marketta, Outi, Petri, Tanja, Tuomas
Working class, small entrepreneurs, farmers (N = 19)	cleaner, electrician, factory worker, fireman, general worker, logger, miner, practical nurse, salesperson, seamstress, small entrepreneur, small farmer, truck driver, waitress	Antti, Börje, Eeva, Emmi, Frida, Juhani, Julia, Kaisa, Katariina, Lauri, Li, Liisa, Maarit, Mika, Paula, Pihla, Raisa, Saara, Sirpa

The participants of this study do not form a representative sample from the whole population of authors. The binary gender distribution of authors in Finland is close to 50/50. In terms of age, authors are rather old compared to artists in other art fields, the average age being 56 years (Rensujeff 2014). Data and research concerning the class background of authors in Finland is outdated, but writers have traditionally tended to come from privileged class-origins (Heikinen 1989). Women, young writers and writers from working-class origins are assumed to be overrepresented in the research material. Reasons for this distortion can be manifold: it is possible, for instance, that people who see themselves as the underdogs of the literary field are keener on responding to requests for data collection that addresses inequalities of the field. With this in mind, the analysis of this data does not offer a representative analysis on the inequalities of the field, but rather opens up possible approaches to understanding class-related inequality in literary work. The research material has been analyzed using qualitative content analysis (see Graneheim et al. 2017).

The analysis presented in this article has certain limitations. First, focusing on an understudied topic in its context it should be interpreted as an opening for an understanding of inequality in literary production rather than a comprehensive analysis of it. Second, as a qualitative analysis, this article does not aim at making representative generalizations about class-related practices of the literary field. Instead, it maps out different possible functions of class.

## THE ROLE OF ECONOMIC CAPITAL

### The privilege of taking risks

It can be assumed that pursuing the financially unstable career of authorship can seem more tempting for people with preexisting economic safety nets or venture capital, which are often connected to class origin. The possibility to

6. All names of the respondents mentioned in this article are pseudonyms

take financial risks or to at least withstand the precarious working conditions of artistic work were experiences mentioned by some of the respondents of the research, mostly those from academic middle-class or upper middle-class origins.

Joona (upper middle-class origin) writes how he feels that he has “the courage to pursue uncertain, artistic goals,” because he knows that “at least my father would support me financially if I failed.” Niina, coming from an academic middle-class background, says that her family was encouraging towards “spontaneous, even financially risk-taking way of life,” which she considers “essential” support, especially in the early stages of her career. Similarly, Petri and Minna, who both first approach social class by denying its influence, also recognized the importance of financial safety nets:

It [social class] has not affected at all. Working as an author was financially possible for me. Social class did not push me towards this profession, nor did it act against it. (Petri, middle-class origin)

At first, I would probably say that it [social class] hasn't [affected]. Then again, I have felt safe to throw myself into a financially precarious condition and profession, because in a certain way I have had my “back covered.” My parents supported me financially when I was young, so I did not accumulate student debt or anything, and because I did not have to work while studying, I was able to focus on my writing. (Minna, upper middle-class origin)

These quotations illustrate how economic capital often refers to concrete monetary resources that can make writing “financially possible,” as Petri notes. In addition, financial affluence can also become embodied as a more general feeling of safety. Bourdieu discusses this in terms of a “guarantee” that economic capital can offer (Bourdieu 1993: 68). In other words, the possibility to take financial risks was not always discussed in terms of concrete economic resources, but also in relation to affectual dispositions towards precarity, such as describing oneself as feeling “safe” or “supported”, and by extension having the possibility to seek symbolically profitable positions, such as authorship (see Bourdieu 1993). This position becomes manifested especially in the experiences of respondents coming from cultural families, such as Kari, whose parents worked as journalists in Helsinki and published fiction. According to Kari's description, it was taken for granted in his family that children went to general upper secondary school instead of vocational school. In regards to economic risk-taking, he writes:

Even though there was some economic hardship in our family from time to time, (...) us kids were never pressured to pursue a future goal that would offer steady or even regular income. I guess this could be understood as some fundamental feeling of carelessness and safety induced by social class. (Kari)

As Sara Ahmed (2014: 147) suggests, “[n]ormativity is comfortable for those who can inhabit it.” Even though Ahmed discusses the feeling of (dis)comfort in relation to queer emotions and heterosexual norms, the same idea can be somewhat applied to social class and the different forms of capital related to it. In Kari’s case, the respondent is able to map this feeling of comfort and link it to his class position. However, privilege is not always acknowledged by those who have it. If the idea of social class is framed as unimportant or outdated per se, the issue becomes easily depoliticized and approached as a question of attitude. This was the case with Martta, who does not explicate the amount of her or her family’s financial resources apart from the brief mention of her CEO grandfather being “wealthy.” Money was not discussed, and the mere idea of aspiring to it was framed as a sort of a taboo:

We never envied anyone or ran after money in my family. What motivated entrepreneurship was personal passion and special skills, not the will to do business. [...] Personally, I would not classify people based on their income. It is dangerous and an underestimation of people. (Martta, upper middle-class origin)

The taboo nature of money was also noted from a different perspective by Kaisa (working-class origin), who reckons how she “[o]nce [...] asked an apparently improper question from my colleague, who had opted out of work after their debut: what do you live on, then? They were unwilling to answer directly.” Both Martta and Kaisa’s experiences can be interpreted in relation to their economic capital and the ways they are willing to acknowledge it. This reflects Bourdieu’s idea of disinterestedness. According to Bourdieu, disinterestedness towards economic realities holds a specific symbolic value in the artistic field – yet only for those who can afford to do so. (Bourdieu 1993.)

Those who did not enjoy the privilege of distancing themselves from economic necessities often described precarity as pervasive and as posing a threat to their writing. Mikko, although of middle-class origin, describes suffering from “constant financial insecurity” which he experienced as “wearing him down” and often making it “hard to plan the future.” He says that he has “often thought about putting writing on a side track” and applying for a salaried job. Yet he would consider this as “giving up” because he does not think he would be able to write enough on the side while working. Liisa, coming from a working-class background, also describes precarity as strongly affecting her possibility to write:

The most important difference is the “safety” or “guarantee” that middle class people always have but working-class people do not – we genuinely cannot afford to fail, and if we get into trouble, there is no one to save or help us. [...] This affects one’s possibilities to take risks an awful lot. A writer should be able to take risks, but many proles cannot do so. (Liisa)

According to this analysis, social class does not work in a reductive manner so that everyone coming from financially secure middle-class origins would feel themselves safe to pursue risky endeavors, or so that everyone whose family has gone through scarce times in their childhoods would never feel entitled to pursue a career as an author. Financial resources are important, and they help to balance precarious conditions, but they do not dispel the symbolic importance of economic or other forms of capital, such as cultural capital. The possession of economic capital, or lack thereof, becomes inscribed in the lived reality of people, therefore becoming embodied and shaping the trajectories of what is considered “possible” to achieve and to whom. Although money as a form of economic capital is easier to measure than cultural capital is, the lack of it still functions not solely on a strictly material level but also on the level of embodiment. In this case, embodiment becomes manifested in feelings of safety and precariousness.

### Keeping their backs covered

Not all respondents from middle-class origins felt that they had been encouraged to ignore money or take risky positions protected by sufficient amounts of economic capital. Several respondents from both middle-class, lower middle-class or working-class origins did not consider having their “backs covered.” A concrete and often necessary way of balancing these risks is to earn one’s living from a non-arts related occupation. In the data, especially those respondents whose parents were not highly educated or had experienced social mobility often stressed the importance of having a “real” job or occupation in addition to writing. As they had succeeded in getting a day job that pays the bills, another difficulty emerges: the lack of time.

Jaana is a debut writer from a lower middle-class origin. Her parents, coming from “very poor homes,” as she describes them, have experienced social mobility but are not highly educated. Because of her parents’ background, Jaana says that she understands “low-income and poor people very well.” She herself identifies as lower middle-class. Money or financial security is not a given for her, and this affects her possibility to pursue a career as an author. She writes:

Because I do not like it when there is no money, I have not had the courage to step away [from my work] to just be a writer. This August, I will start working in a position that pays well. I do not know how I will have time to write, and that makes me anxious. I will probably write in the evenings, nights and on weekends, so that I can leave some time for my children as well. (Jaana)

Hanna, coming from a middle-class origin, thinks that it was precisely because of her middle-class background that she “did not even come to think of the possibility of having an artistic career” when she was young. Instead, she ended up in salaried work with a university degree and was able to publish her debut

only after turning 40, when the “conditions of life had already been established.” Once Hanna had been able to build a life that responded to middle-class norms, it “became hard to detach from them and throw oneself into the financial insecurity of being an author.” Tanja and Laura, both from lower middle-class families, shared similar experiences:

After high school, it was an impossible thought for me to “become a writer” or even a humanist. I absolutely wanted a profession that pays the bills, and finance would not be unstable [...] I already knew back then that I wanted to be a writer, but I thought that I could fulfil my calling along with my day job. I never thought that it would be possible to support myself as an author. (Tanja)

Art is not an occupation, but as a hobby it is okay. And if one wants to do it as a professional, one must be so good that they can manage with it financially. This is the attitude I have been raised into and struggled with. (Laura)

In such examples, there seems to be no allowance for positions in which the disavowal of economic issues would be possible. By contrast, the quotes echo what Bourdieu (2010) has called “the choice of the necessary”, meaning that people who lack sufficient resources (i.e. the working class) are unable to orient themselves to profitable positions, therefore making a virtue out of necessity. Although the choice of necessity is largely connected to the economic conditions of the working class, it is also related to questions of taste and culture. As an example, Bourdieu (2010: 379–380) lists the way of saying how something is “not for us” or the refusal of “fancy nonsense” in the name of “practical” choices.

The idea of choosing the necessary was also reflected in the data of this research, especially on the discussions of the need of having a “real job”. In addition to the above quotations, Antti (working class/poor entrepreneurial family) writes about his family’s disappointment when he became “a writing man, not a working man.” Outi (lower middle class) describes how it was her mother’s favorite expression to say that “it is best to be just an ordinary person,” a message that Outi interpreted as claiming that “being an artist is reserved for better people, for a group we don’t belong to, so there is no point in yearning for it.” In these examples, the idea of “having a real profession” and being able to support oneself financially can be read as virtues derived from the necessity of economic conditions – rooted in the economy, but not limited to it. As Kaisa, coming from working-class origin, writes: “even if I could, I wouldn’t want to sponge off anyone” referring to the possibility of being financially supported by someone else. However, in contrast to Bourdieu, the choice of necessity was not connected solely to respondents from working-class origins, but was also reflected in the responses of those coming from a middle-class background.

Respondents who emphasized the need for and role of a salaried day job seem to be living financially rather secure lives. Yet this does not mean that they do not go through any lean times or that they are highly paid. The primary resource they had a shortage of, based on their written responses, is time instead of money. Day jobs were often mentioned as limiting writers' possibilities to concentrate on their work because of the obvious time limitations jobs entail. Bearing in mind the accumulative tendency of capital, this necessarily influences writers' possibilities of gaining cultural capital, that is, to symbolically position themselves in more profitable positions (Bourdieu 1993). In the descriptions of respondents who have to work while writing, time becomes an essential luxury they cannot afford.

## EMBODIMENT OF CULTURAL CAPITAL

### Reading matters: experiences of childhood cultural activities

Research on inequality in the cultural and creative industries have emphasized the importance between cultural consumption and production when understanding the formations of inequalities (O'Brien & Oakley 2015; Oakley & O'Brien 2016; Bull & Scharff 2017). In their research on class inequalities in classical music, Anna Bull and Christina Scharff (2017) noted how classical musicians from middle-class origins described their families rather as musical than middle-class, and therefore understated the importance of class origin on the formations of their artistic careers. The experiences of being exposed to art and culture are felt as more defining as social class, even though these are also linked to one another.

Reflecting the middle-class tendency to emphasize cultural activity and downplay social class, it was common especially amongst respondents from middle-class and entrepreneurial origins to emphasize their own and their families' reading activities as affecting their becoming authors more than their social class. This was often presented in a comparative manner so that the description started with a negation of the impact social class had and continued with the emphasis on the importance of active reading habits. Marketta, for instance, coming from a seemingly wealthy entrepreneurial family, writes how "I don't see social class as having an effect. What mattered was that we used to read in our family." Antero, also from an entrepreneurial family, writes very similarly how "we used to read a lot in my childhood home, and I assume that mattered more [than social class]." In the experiences of authors coming from middle-class and especially academic middle-class origins, reading was often framed as an activity that was actively encouraged. Literature was appreciated, and families often had the tools, time and ability to support the interest expressed by the young literature enthusiasts.

Despite the fact that exposure to literature carries a great importance on becoming a writer, it does not rule out the importance of class. Emphasizing only the positive side effects of active literary pastime while disregarding the

issue of class overlooks the fact that cultural interests and consumption are socially differentiated activities (see Purhonen et al. 2014). This being said, the relationship between social class and cultural activities is never completely straightforward. Reading is not an unfamiliar hobby in working-class families, and the free and extensive library network has made literature one of the most easily accessible art forms in Finland.

Respondents from working-class and lower middle-class origins in which reading was a regular and encouraged activity did generally describe this as something that took place despite their class rather than because of it. Julia writes that she was “raised in a blue-collar family, *but* one in which reading was a frequent activity” (emphasis added). Liisa starts her response by talking about “all the good things” that drove her to be an author, for instance how her “working-class *yet* verbally talented [...] mother” (emphasis added) used to read to her a lot and also taught her “to love libraries.”

However, several respondents from especially working-class origins talked about the lack of (encouragement to engage in) cultural activities in their childhood homes. In these responses, reading was framed as a solitary activity practiced by the individual, which was in contrast to the respondents who approached reading as an activity that took place and was encouraged in their families. Katariina describes how “nobody read to me when I was a child,” and that her childhood home was “quite stripped of culture anyway.” Mika underlines his own activity in cultural hobbies by telling how he learned to play the guitar “almost completely by myself,” and how in his late twenties he “started reading on his own a ton.” Both Katariina and Mika are from working-class origins, as is Pihla, who describes her own and her parents’ different relations towards reading as the following:

But I did read. I read, and I wrote. Unlike my parents who, still to this day, have not read a single book in addition to their school books they read in elementary school. Not even my debut, which I gave them as a gift, not expecting anything from them. (Pihla)

The lack of cultural activities should not, however, be one-sidedly interpreted as hostility towards arts and culture. Katariina, cited above, writes about how her interest towards art was never responded to with contempt, but that her “strong aspiration towards art rather created confusion and a sense of helplessness.” Because social class is connected to the amount of legitimate cultural capital that one possesses, the lack of this capital makes it hard, even impossible, to transfer it to the next generation, regardless if one considers it valuable or not.

### **Feelings of outsidership and not-belonging**

In the research material, a few respondents from middle-class origins wrote that they had experienced feelings of discomfort when someone had labeled them as

belonging to the “academic cultural elite” (Arja) or coming from a “privileged background” (Tapani). These exceptions aside, discomfort and feelings of outsiderhood were mostly expressed by respondents coming from working-class or lower middle-class origins, especially women. This finding resonates with Scharff’s study on inequalities in classical music, where it was noted that even though the study respondents from middle-class origins generally discussed issues of class, they did not share the experiences of class-related outsiderhood felt by respondents from working-class origins (Scharff 2018).

Several respondents coming from families with low amounts of cultural capital – both from working-class and lower middle-class families – experienced feelings ranging from shame and anxiety to exhaustion, uncertainty and bitterness for their lack of cultural knowledge and *Bildung*. These feelings were often experienced in relation to their surrounding community and colleagues. The realization of this difference was located, for instance, in an educational context or at the point when entering the literary field as a debut writer, like in the case with Pihla (working-class origin) and Tanja (lower middle-class origin):

At some point in high school it began to appear to me why I constantly felt somehow odd. Like there would be something fundamental I could not comprehend, and therefore I was always the one who had to catch up. I understood that all the knowledge that I possessed I had acquired myself, and that there were a lot of gaps to fill. (Pihla)

Later I realized that many writers had went to study communications or literature studies. Their reading vastly surpassed mine, and I have experienced feelings of shame and anxiety. Especially as a debuting author I was afraid that the shallowness of my literary education would be exposed. (Tanja)

The experiences shared by Pihla and Tanja can be interpreted within the Bourdieusian framework by claiming that the habitus they had absorbed in their childhood was now experienced as being out of sync with their current field. The feeling of lagging behind can feel tiresome, especially if one tries to cope with it by overachieving to catch up the edge with more cultivated colleagues. Katariina, coming from a working-class background, feels that she has had to do “all the work by herself,” “drag herself” into cultural activities, and “try to get a grip from the margins of art.” Pihla, cited above, feels that “the mere idea of everything one has missed out (...) just because one is born as a child of factory workers can wear on you.” However, leaning into the protestant work ethic might not be the most prestigious coping mechanism in the art world, which values disinterestedness. Once she entered the art field as a student, Tanja felt that she wanted to “catch up all on the gaping shortfalls” in her knowledge. This increased her “straight A-student behavior”, making her feel – again – alienated from the “bohemian” artistic sphere. The feeling of being “out of sync” was a common and reoccurring theme among those respondents coming from families with a low amount of cultural capital.



It is notable that these experiences are not strictly limited to concrete practices taking place in the literary field, such as literary events or interactions with publishers. The borders between art, literature and the rest of life and society are porous, hence making a distinction between which experiences are felt as a writer or as a civilian practically an impossible task to perform. For instance Antti, coming from working class/poor entrepreneurial family, reports feeling “out of place” in his day job as a teacher at an arts university. Kaisa, coming from working-class origin, describes how she automatically thinks other people are better than she is – even wondering if she might be “uninformed” or “too subjective or aggressive” when taking part in the data collection of this research.

Even though one would have “ostensibly risen from the working class” in terms of education or profession, this does not always mean leaving it behind economically or mentally, as described by Pihla. In some replies, the world of arts and literature is pictured almost as a parallel universe: a “sublime world” (Heidi) or utopia (Outi) where you need to make a “crusade” to enter (Katariina) and where “fathers are professors and mothers are magical artists” (Pihla). Being an artist was sometimes thought to be destined for “better people, among which we are not included” (Outi), again echoing the idea that class and class-based inequalities are not just a question of what people *have* but rather what they *are* or have been made to be. These experiences reflect Bourdieu’s writings on legitimate culture, when he describes it as “a separate universe” protected by a “magical barrier” (Bourdieu 2010: 94). The prestigious status that art still carries in society poses challenges for those trying to enter the field without the embodied feeling of being entitled to it.

The idea of a separate art world hints that if one has not absorbed a sufficient amount of cultural knowledge “in their breast milk”, as put by Pihla, they will be flawed and somehow separate forever. Some respondents draw from their early childhood memories when they describe how they “acknowledged already from an early age that I did not belong to ‘the fancy people’” (Börje). Emmi reflects on her childhood memories and how she could not afford to have hobbies, cool clothes or go to the hairdresser. This, she considers, has stayed with her as “the typical Finnish feeling” that says “I can’t do anything, I’m not anything, please don’t notice me.” Pihla also describes an incident from her childhood that left her with the idea of how “being working-class is something that is stuck to my skin, it smells from kilometers away and everyone will always notice it from me.”

Especially the last extract by Pihla echoes the often-cited words by Annette Kuhn (2002/1995: 117), according to whom “class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your psyche, at the very core of your being”, a description resembling the concepts of habitus and inscription. Just as any mechanism of naming and labeling does, inscription serves as a tool for the hierarchization of people, meaning it also functions as the bedrock of the economy and economic inequality. (Skeggs 2004.) What this mechanism highlights

is that class cannot be understood simply as a constellation of resources that can be attached from a person, but that they are embodied on the level of experience and lived through in daily life.

### Refusing to be a victim

Even though Skeggs' conception of inscription is by definition something that is impossible to completely escape from, it still should not be read as an impediment for any individual action. By contrast, Skeggs considers that "[t]he refusal to accept inscription and be bound by its value" works as "a significant act in challenging the dominant symbolic order" (Skeggs 2004: 13). In other words, refusal is possible, and through it, new forms of action and ways of understanding authorship can be developed.

Liisa feels that because of her working-class origin she will "never be able to infiltrate the middle-class social code" in a way that would benefit her. Even though she notices that this is a disadvantage in the literary field, she still "does not want to change" into something that she is not, nor to hide or shame her background. Similar to Liisa, many respondents noted how their backgrounds had affected them without romanticizing it nor presenting themselves as victims. By contrast, they felt that their background also gave them the perseverance to write:

I guess my bleak childhood made me read and seek knowledge that I could not find from home. At least it made it easier to stand the depressing reality and guided me towards finding good literature. (Juhani, working-class origin)

I think childhood poverty affected my becoming a writer in the sense that because we did not have lots of money, libraries and writing being free of charge were hobbies that were easy to get into. Then again, writing and getting lost in story worlds were a way of escaping reality. (...) I wanted to go to university to study literature, I wanted to "show" that I can do it, and that one does not have to come from a cultural home in order to become a writer. (Raisa, working-class origin)

It is also possible that the feelings of being more or less excluded from the literary field can lead to new kinds of definitions of authorship, and therefore to the challenging of the prevailing symbolic order (see Skeggs 2004). In the recent public discussion of authorship and artistic practice following the #MeToo campaign, many journalists have in their contemporaneous analysis aimed at challenging the masculine myth of the artistic genius, which is considered to maintain some of the malign practices and misuse of power taking place in the field (Hess 2017; Burton 2017; Steiner 2017; Kanerva & Typpö 2018; Kanerva 2019). A similar logic can be mapped out in the way some authors from working-class origins or middle-class origins with a low amount of cultural capital aimed at challenging the "elitist" figure of a disinterested author. This was a point made by Tuomas (middle-class origin), Antti and Saara (working-class origins), who considered "high-flying art talk" as unfa-

miliar to them, and experienced their relation to authorship as “down to earth” and uninterested in the “hyper-academic and theoretical phenomena of contemporary art.” Heidi, feeling excluded from the “sublime art world,” describes poetically how she tries to clear her own space from the margins:

I have wanted to give life and entitlement to all that has been left outside of art, all that has been despised and shunned; as my role models I have found the world of letters and diaries, poems and drawings of the mentally ill; the world written in the blood and tears of amateur artists has been my world; smudges and mistakes have been my aesthetics; the signs of life, the world of children, all that unofficial that I felt “real art” has censored. The lived life. (Heidi)

Such statements can be seen to resonate with the long tradition of understanding working-class authors as autodidacts with first-hand information about the lived reality of the working classes. Furthermore, it connects to the notion of how challenging prevailing stereotypes has been one of the endeavors of working-class literature. (Nilsson 2017.) The resistance presented towards the intrinsic hierarchies of the artistic field can also be interpreted in relation to genres and more generally to the question of what is considered high artistic quality in literary works. Be that as it may, the resistance towards the norms are not presented in a way that would undermine their importance or existence. Rather, tools of action – however limited they might be – are taken into one’s own hands.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I have analyzed class-related experiences of artistic work among contemporary authors in the Finnish literary field. I have approached the issue from a Bourdieusian framework, especially by using the concepts of economic and cultural capital, habitus and Skeggs’ conception of inscription.

The analysis shows that economic and cultural capital diverge from one another in terms of how they are recognized. The common sense understanding of social class as a category for naming economic inequality was also reflected in the experiences of writers, especially those coming from middle-class or upper middle-class backgrounds. In these responses, economic affluence and safety-nets were more easily recognized as privileges, whereas active cultural hobbies were more often dissociated from social class. However, for those lacking sufficient amounts of legitimate cultural capital, this lack was deeply felt. In this respect, class and class-related practices related to how different forms of capital are embodied in the habitus: they do not work simply as detachable resources possessed by an individual, in the sense that they could be put into use whenever suitable.

The analysis also shows that both economic and cultural capital are central in the formation of class relations in the literary field. In the experiences of the respondents, the impacts of social class are often inscribed in the habitus and

manifested, for instance, as feelings of safety or unsafety (economic capital) and of outsidership and not-belonging (cultural capital). In the lived experiences of authors, these affects and the capital they relate to often intertwine. In this respect, the analysis echoes Pierre Bourdieu's notion of how the economic sphere cannot be reduced to questions of money or concrete financial resources: "the most innovative enterprises [in art and literature] are the privilege of those who have inherited both the boldness and the insurance that enable this freedom to grow" (Bourdieu 1993: 170). Boldness and insurance are as intertwined as capital is: economic capital assures freedom from necessities, which enables cultural activity and taking artistic risks.

As noted, cultural capital, or the lack thereof, is not something that can be differentiated from its holder and analyzed separately, but it rather functions as a marker of individualized and inscribed value, in other words, of embodied cultural capital (See Skeggs 1997; Skeggs 2004). Regardless of the embodied form of class-related practices, there are still attempts made to challenge the prevailing symbolic order of the field. Even though writers coming from working-class origins generally felt they suffered due to their class background and did consider this as a sign of inequality, they also often refused to be positioned as victims. In other words, instead of considering their role as a fatalistic destiny, they participate in the process of challenging the prevailing symbolic order (Skeggs 2004).

To conclude, the analysis has shown that social class does play a role in the contemporary Finnish literary field, but often in terms that are hard to measure. Being all but exhaustive, the analysis presented in this article can hopefully encourage to form questions for further research, both qualitative and quantitative. By that, the seemingly magical barriers of art can perhaps become more tangible and therefore possible to change.

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