Mogens Klitgaard

There's a Man Sitting on a Trolley

Translated and with an Introduction and Notes by Marc Linder

Fānpihuà Press
Iowa City
2001
There's a man sitting on a trolley/ by Mogens Klitgaard. Translated and with an Introduction and Notes by Marc Linder

xlix, 228 p.; map; 21 cm.
Includes bibliographical references
ISBN 0-9673899-7-6
PT8175.K55 D4713 2001
Library of Congress Control Number 2001132480
Introduction

1. Mogens Klitgaard’s Life and Works

In his six years as a novelist during a very brief life, Mogens Klitgaard succeeded in writing six books that made him one of Denmark’s most interesting social-critical realist and historical novelists of the interwar period. He has been called “[t]he central representative of the period’s ironic-elegant everyday realism”1 and “one of Danish realism’s classics.”2

Klitgaard was born into a solidly middle-class family in Valby—an industrializing village that had been incorporated into Copenhagen in 19013—on August 23, 1906. His father was a department head of the umbrella organization of the Danish consumer co-operative stores (Fællesforeningen af Danmarks brugsforeninger). His secure childhood began to dissolve at the age of six when his 42-year-old mother died of cancer in 1913; by the age of ten he had become an orphan when his father also died of cancer at 47 in 1916. After briefly living with his stepmother—his father had married the family’s maid the year after his

---


wife’s death—who had never shown any interest in him or his older sister, he moved in with his aunt and uncle in nearby (and relatively affluent) Frederiksberg. Although they were fond of him, the childless couple did not feel equal to the task of being parents and in 1917 they placed him in the Royal Orphanage (*Det kongelige Opføstringshus*) in Copenhagen, which had been founded by King Frederik V in 1753.4

This harsh and highly structured total institution, which enforced obedience, punctuality, and order by corporal punishment and—what was even more painful for Klitgaard—detention preventing him from spending weekends with his aunt and uncle and brother and sister, imbued him, a wilful child known as an “escape artist” since the age of four, with an exceedingly intense desire for freedom.5

At the end of the summer of 1921, at the age of fourteen (after his confirmation and completing the highest school grade at the orphanage) he was placed out as a market-gardener’s apprentice in Rødvig, a Zealand coastal town about 40 miles south of

---

4 Bertel Bing, “Ligefremt Interview: Virkelig Romantik i Hverdagslivet,” *Nationaltidende*, June 10, 1937; *Dansk biografisk leksikon* 8:41 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1981); Leon Jaurnow, “Drommen om noget andet—portræt af Mogens Klitgaard i anledning af 50-året for hans død,” in *Magasin fra Det kongelige bibliotek* 10:3-14 at 4 (1995); Leon Jaurnow, “Efterskrift,” in Mogens Klitgaard, *Der sidder en mand i en sporvogn* 193-209 at 202 (N.p.: Dansk Lærerforeningen, 1997); Leon Jaurnow, *Den lyse vagabond: Mogens Klitgaards liv og forfatterskab* 8-11 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, forthcoming); telephone interview with Inga Klitgaard (May 25, 2001). In Klitgaard’s day Det kgl. Opføstringshus was a boarding school both for boys without parents and boys facing various social problems at home; for example, a single mother with a large number of children might request admission of one of more of her children there. Email from Leon Jaurnow (June 11, 2001).

5 Jaurnow, *Den lyse vagabond* at 12-17.
Copenhagen, where he was supposed to spend five years. As he explained in newspaper interviews a few days after *There's a Man Sitting on a Trolley* appeared and again in an autobiographical piece in 1938, the choice had not been his: his brother Svend, who was ten years older and acted as a kind of guardian, and the orphanage had chosen the apprenticeship for him. He had never wished to become a gardener and never cared a bit for the "hard toil of an unskilled laborer from morning till evening"; but being an orphan, he had to go someplace where he would not be a burden to anyone. For his 12-hour workday the young Klitgaard received room and board and 10 crowns per month.6

Klitgaard revisited his feelings about this kind of work many years later in a newspaper essay with his observations while sitting in a village inn. When a gardener’s apprentice enters the inn, Klitgaard is moved to note: "Seen from a taproom in North Zealand, life looks good and festive; seen from a desolate plowed field behind a beet pit, it looks different. With a spade in your hand, an icy wind at your back and four hours till dinner, it looks different. Then you don’t give a damn about natural beauty and you console yourself with the thought that in half a year you’re going to get twenty crowns more. If in fact you’re not fired before then."7

His nominal wage—equivalent to less than two dollars when a loaf of bread cost about one crown8—made his position rather...
isolated, and, in the spring of 1922, after a little under a year, he engaged in his first act of “rebellion”—flight. One day he got into a dispute with the market-gardener, threw down his tools, hopped on to a bicycle, and headed to Elsinore about 70 miles away; after stopping in Copenhagen to telephone his family to inform them of his decision, he bicycled up the Zealand coast and crossed over to Sweden, making his way north. Initially he made a living dealing in notions and working for a farmer. At the age of fifteen he had thus embarked on a vagabondage that would last a decade.

His “rebellion,” as Klitgaard explained to the well-known journalist and novelist Christian Houmark in an interview in the right-wing tabloid *B.T.* a few days after *There's a Man Sitting on a Trolley* appeared, was against “the whole thing,” though not actually against “society.” On the one hand he was driven by a “longing to go abroad” to see and experience; on the other hand, his life was “extremely depressing” because he simply lacked the money to buy himself “anything new”—he had to use his minuscule pay to buy wooden work shoes—and get out and about.

---

penhagen: Thiele, 1926); Danmarks Statistik, *Statistisk Aarbog 1922*, tab. 82 at 96 (Copenhagen: Thiele, 1922).

like the other young people.\textsuperscript{10}

The opening sentence of his autobiographical novel may have declared that he sometimes believed that chance occurrences do not determine our lives,\textsuperscript{11} but it seems highly probable that his own life would have followed a radically different course had his brother Svend, instead of giving him a one-way train ticket to Rødvig, helped him realize his wish of becoming a clerical trainee at the Copenhagen office of the East Asiatic Company—Denmark’s premier agent of colonial exploitation—with prospects of being stationed under the Orient’s green palms and baking sun.\textsuperscript{12}

Between 1922 and 1932 Klitgaard lived in Sweden, Germany, France, and England, working as a seaman, smuggler, counterman, waiter, dishwasher, office worker, farm worker, and “agitation leader in a revolutionary organization,” though he never had a permanent job and worked from one day to the next. In between he also returned for various periods of time to Copenhagen, where, for example, in 1923 he worked at a dairy, and sometimes lived on public assistance.\textsuperscript{13} His “greatest experience” as a vagabond, as he put it in his largely autobiographical novel, \textit{Gud mildner Luft for de klippede Får} (\textit{God Tempers the Wind to the Shorn Lamb}), was to lie on his back by the roadside and “just stare up into the air, to be completely free and independent, completely without responsibility, without obligations. Freer than the birds, which have a nest and mate and chicks and all that stuff.”\textsuperscript{14} It was an attitude that reappeared in other novels

\textsuperscript{10}Houmark, “Daarligt egnet til at møde Livet.”
\textsuperscript{11}Klitgaard, \textit{Gud mildner Luft for de klippede Får} at 7.
\textsuperscript{12}Jaurnow, \textit{Den lyse vagabond} at 27.
\textsuperscript{13}Mow., “Min Bog var for mig Knald eller Fald—siger Mogens Klitgaard”; Klitgaard, “En Søndag for to Aar siden”; Ebbe Neergaard, \textit{Mogens Klitgaard} 5 (Copenhagen: Carit Andersen, 1941); Jaurnow, \textit{Den lyse vagabond} at 23.
\textsuperscript{14}Mogens Klitgaard, \textit{Gud mildner Luft for de klippede Får} 44
too. Even in his posthumously published science-fiction novel written in 1932-33, Klitgaard called “lying by the roadside staring up at the blue sky with the drifting clouds . . . paradise on earth.”

The problem, however, was that Klitgaard soon discovered that gazing at the sky from a horizontal position was not possible that often—even for a vagabond. Not only did “the danger of getting work lurk everywhere,” but the repetitiveness of the experiences was “tiring, and life as a vagabond becomes just as monotonous and rather boring as the work in a factory or an office—everything becomes habit.” That routine reached its absurdist high point when Klitgaard wound up running a bureaucratically organized cigarette smuggling business on the northern Norwegian-Swedish border—an activity that came to an end in November 1924 when the Swedish police arrested him and he was deported to Copenhagen for being unable to support himself. He was just as unable to support himself in Denmark delivering groceries, but he was not subject to deportation and could obtain public assistance.

A turning point in his life took place in 1929 when he got a

(N.p.: Carit Andersen, n.d. [1967] [1938]). The title of the book is usually attributed to Laurence Sterne though it can be traced back farther. Klitgaard uses the phrase at the end of the book when the vagabond-narrator expresses pride in not having been taken in by the stories that are told to keep people satisfied in their slavery: “So that the sheep not make a ruckus about being clipped, they say that God tempers the wind to them.” Id. at 151.

15Mogens Klitgaard, de sindssyges kloede 68 (Copenhagen: Carit Andersen, 1968).
16Klitgaard, Gud mildner luften for de klippede får at 44.
17Klitgaard, Gud mildner luften for de klippede får at 81.
job as a scorekeeper-pinsetter at Helmbeck’s billiard parlor above the Kino-Palæt in Copenhagen.\textsuperscript{19} His 70- to 84-hour workweek was compensated at a mere 30 crowns.\textsuperscript{20} That same year his failing health led to his rejection as a soldier, and after having lived outdoors for a decade, he was even more vulnerable to the smoky indoor air, and on New Year’s Eve 1932 he was admitted on an emergency basis to the tuberculosis ward of Copenhagen’s municipal Øresund hospital. On March 7, 1933, he was then transferred to the tuberculosis sanatorium at Boserup near Roskilde, about 20 miles from Copenhagen, where he remained a patient until August 3, 1933.\textsuperscript{21}

While there he became an avid and voracious reader, especially fascinated by the American novelists Dos Passos, Hemingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, in addition to Ilya Ehrenburg, Erich Kästner, B. Traven, Hans Kirk, and Martin Andersen Nexø.\textsuperscript{22} During his stay at the sanatorium he also wrote his first book, a socialist science-fiction novel (*The Globe of the Insane*) about a scientific expedition to another planet (*nedroj*—the Danish word for “earth” spelled backwards).\textsuperscript{23} Through a common friend in left-wing cultural circles (Helge Andersen, who was associated

---

\textsuperscript{19}For a photograph from the year 1936, see *København: Før og nu*, Vol. VI: *Frederiksberg, Yderkvarterer, Forstæder* at 96.

\textsuperscript{20}See below note to p. 79 on wages in Copenhagen at this time.

\textsuperscript{21}Mow., “Min Bog var for mig Knald eller Fald—siger Mogens Klitgaard” (70 hours); Klitgaard, “En Søndag for to Aar siden” (84 hours); Jaurnow, *Den lyse vagabond* at 40, 44, 57. According to Klitgaard’s own account, he began working as a scorekeeper in 1932, but his biographer insists that Klitgaard’s own diary notes show that his memory later failed him. Email from Leon Jaurnow (June 1, 2001).

\textsuperscript{22}Poul Carit Andersen, “Mogens Klitgaard,” in Klitgaard, *de sindssyges klode* 5-28 at 13; Jaurnow, “Drømmen om noget andet” at 8, 10.

\textsuperscript{23}Earlier, in 1926, he had written poetry that he was unable to publish. Jaurnow, *Den lyse vagabond* at 33-36.
with the magazine *Clarté* and later became a noted author of books on economic power in Denmark), Klitgaard sent the manuscript to Hans Kirk, who in 1928 had published his first novel, *The Fishermen*, to critical acclaim, and was already a critic of some note. Though a communist, Kirk never let his political agreements interfere with his judgment of his comrades’ literary efforts.24

On July 2, 1934, Kirk replied to Andersen: “There’s no doubt that he has talent.” Although the book was “handsomely and sensibly” constructed, Kirk had two crucial objections. First, Klitgaard’s language was academically dry and stiff and his dialogs old-fashionedly bookish. Kirk observed that Klitgaard would have to work energetically at freeing himself from that style if his intention was to become a writer. Secondly, the psychological conflict in the book was too slight and uninteresting. The “decisive” point for Kirk was whether Klitgaard could train his psychological sense of what goes on in people. Since Klitgaard was young, he could do it, but it would demand great patience. In addition to vigilantly observing himself and others, he advised Klitgaard to “study modern psychology—Freud.” Kirk’s more wide-ranging concluding remarks are

---

24For example, in 1929, just one year after he had published *The Fishermen*, Kirk wrote a scathing review of a novel about large farmers during World War I by Martin Andersen Nexø, the author of *Pelle the Conqueror* and, together with Maxim Gorky, arguably the world’s foremost proletarian novelist. Kirk stressed that Andersen Nexø—who many decades earlier had worked as a poor farm laborer—had written about the farmers without having any real familiarity with them, having acquired all his knowledge from newspapers. Hans Kirk, Review of *Midi i en Jærntid*, in *Lolland-Falsters Folketidende*, Aug. 22-23, 1929, reprinted in Hans Kirk, *Litterature og tendens: Essays of artikler* 80-86 (Børge Houmann ed.; Copenhagen: Gyldendals Uglebøger, 1974). Kirk did not join the Danish Communist party until 1931, but he was a Marxist-socialist by the mid-1920s.
more intriguing. The form that Klitgaard had chosen for the novel appeared “obsolete” to Kirk:

After all, there isn’t the slightest reason to improvise this complicated action apparatus to give a critique of capitalist society. One was forced to do that in Holberg’s time—Niels Klim’s subterranean travel—but in our day one can of course criticize and satirize quite openly. However, there is something entirely first-rate about the subject: Capital, which seeks to prevent the scientist from publishing his results because they don’t suit it. If Klitgaard took up this theme, in another form, and if he succeeded in freeing his style and gaining broader psychological insight, I believe it could turn into an excellent book.25

Klitgaard respected Kirk’s opinion so highly that he put the manuscript away, never showed it to anyone else, and never published it.26 As its posthumous publication in 1968 revealed,

25Letter from Hans Kirk to Helge Andersen (July 2, 1934), in Mogens Klitgaard’s papers, Det kongelige Bibliotek (Copenhagen), NKS 2839, 2 (copy furnished by Leon Jaurnow). Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754) was the founder of modern Danish literature and the leading figure of the Danish enlightenment. He published his satirical science fiction poem Nicolai Klimii iter subterraneum in Latin in 1741; it was translated into English as The Journey of Niels Klim to the World Underground.

26This account is based on the forthcoming biography of Klitgaard by Leon Jaurnow, who has studied Klitgaard’s papers at the Royal Library in Copenhagen. Jaurnow speculates that the divergent account given by Neergaard and Carit Andersen, who were friends of Klitgaard, was based on Klitgaard’s own erroneous recollection. These authors reported that Klitgaard had sent the manuscript directly to Kirk, who wrote him a letter in reply. Neergaard, Mogens Klitgaard at 5; Carit Andersen, “Mogens Klitgaard” at 14. The account given in Jaurnow’s unpublished biography corrects an earlier version according to which Klitgaard had sent the manuscript to an (unnamed) publisher, which commissioned a report from Kirk. Jaurnow, “Efterskrift” at 206.
Kirk and Klitgaard were right: though the novel was not uninteresting, its scarcely veiled indirect critique of conditions on Earth was tediously heavy-handed. None of Klitgaard's published novels ever displayed such defects or deficiencies.

After he was discharged from the sanatorium in 1933, Klitgaard's health was no longer robust enough to permit him to resume his vagabondage. But his longing to return to life grew stronger and stronger and he resumed his old job as billiard scorekeeper, where he did meet an interesting cross-section of the Copenhagen populace, which provided him with rich material for his first published novel. He also became involved in left-wing political organizations such as Studentersamfundet (though called Student Society, its members included non-student left-wing youth, and Hans Kirk, for example, was its chairman in the 1930s more than a decade after he had left the university) and the Danish Communist Party's Røde Hjælp (Red Aid)—which assisted communist refugees—of which he became secretary. Klitgaard, however, never joined the party itself because he wished

Klitgaard's widow believes that Jaurnow is wrong on this point, but she has no first-hand knowledge since she did not know Klitgaard in 1933. Telephone interview with Inga Klitgaard (May 25, 2001).

27 Klitgaard, de sindssyges klode. For a more positive assessment, see Dansk litteraturhistorie, vol. 7: Demokrati og kulturkamp 1901-45, at 436. The manuscript was written without any capital letters; although until the orthographic reform of 1948 all Danish nouns were capitalized (as they still are in German), the first edition of Der sidder en Mand i en Sporvogn capitalized only proper names as in English. Klitgaard's very first publication (in 1933) was an article on the functional obsoleteness of the way the letters of the alphabet were written that advocated the abolition of capital letters. Jaurnow, Den lyse vagabond at 48-49.

to retain his independence.29

When asked directly by a journalist in June 1937 whether he was a communist, Klitgaard replied: “I’m a revolutionary humanist even though that sounds like a paradox, because I don’t understand how one can be a humanist today without being revolutionary.”30 Similarly, when asked whether he was a Marxist, he responded: “I don’t want to be categorized. I’m not a fanatic in any area.”31

How he came to write There’s a Man Sitting on a Trolley is an interesting story in its own right. According to accounts he gave in 1937 and 1938, on turning 30 in 1936 he “felt a beginning self-contempt”32 in taking a quick survey of the insignificant way his life had passed until then: “the course of events painted a picture of a weak person, a person who was seeking freedom, but who’d never been so far removed from freedom as now.” But he “actually couldn’t see where the mistake lay, on which occasion or occasions he should have behaved differently.” People do do things which in their consequences turn out to have been wrong, but “taking into account the situation, taking into account my nature, my upbringing, and my morality, I couldn’t perceive the great, decisive mistake I must have committed.” The fear and agitation unleashed by his thirtieth birthday suddenly came over him while he was sitting in Kongens Nytorv—one of Copenhagen’s most popular squares—one Sunday afternoon in the late summer of 1936. Klitgaard imagined that in “semi-elegant and awfully boring” Kongens Nytorv the

---

29 Carit Andersen, “Mogens Klitgaard” at 14; Jaurnow, Den lyse vagabond at 59-63; telephone interviews with Inga Klitgaard and Leon Jaurnow (May 25, 2001).

30 Houmark, “Daarligt egnet til at møde Livet.”

31 Jaurnow, Den lyse vagabond at 78 (quoting an unidentified source in Klitgaard’s papers at the Royal Library).

32 Houmark, “Daarligt egnet til at møde Livet.”
frayed edges on his pants were the most conspicuous ones there to the “boring middle-class people whose sole ambition was to rise to a higher social level.” It was not the frayed edges per se he cared about, but only as an expression of the unfreedom in which he found himself at a time when he still suffered from the illusion that people who wandered the roads were free, although in fact no one was more dependent on his surroundings than a beggar. Sitting there, he recalled one morning in the 1920s when, penniless in Paris, he had been on the way to sign up for the Foreign Legion; by sheer coincidence he ran into a Dane who lent him 100 francs and persuaded him not to join. Realizing that his whole life had consisted of lucky and unlucky coincidences, he left Kongens Nytorv, went home, and began writing *There’s a Man Sitting on a Trolley.*

He began work on the novel in November 1936 and, despite the time-consuming demands of his job and having only enough money to buy 25 sheets of paper at a time, he was able to complete it by January 1937. Because he thought about the book while at work and walking to and from work, “it came into being, so to speak, on the street it deals with.” One day he personally delivered it to the broad-minded publishing house Povl Branner, put it on the counter, and went home and waited for a response impatiently, especially since a turn for the worse in his health forced him to work half-time at a wage that failed to cover even his modest needs. The manuscript was accepted and the book appeared on June 1, 1937.

Publication of the book, Klitgaard told an interviewer, meant more to him than anyone imagined. Writing it had not been

---

33 Klitgaard, “En Søndag for to Aar siden.”
34 Mow., “Min Bog var for mig Knald eller Fald—siger Mogens Klitgaard”; Klitgaard, “En Søndag for to Aar siden”; Carit Andersen, “Mogens Klitgaard” at 17; Neergaard, *Mogens Klitgaard* at 8. These sources give conflicting accounts of when Klitgaard began work on the book; Klitgaard himself may have been the origin of the confusion.
driven by “literary ambition”; rather it was “make or break” for his life. That personal comment prompted the interviewer to ask whether the book’s main character was in outline Klitgaard himself. Klitgaard replied that one might well say that, except that for Lundegaard it became “break,” “and maybe that was in fact what I was expecting in my heart of hearts when I wrote the book.”

Critics “unanimously praised” the novel as a “brilliant debut.” It became “the book of the year,” receiving “the most laudatory reviews” of any debut novel in “many years” and going through four printings reaching a best-seller-like total of 8,000 copies in three or four months. Klitgaard was able to give notice at the billiard parlor. Instead of setting pins, he was asked to give readings, and excerpts from the novel were read on Danish state radio. In retrospect, one skeptical literary critic called the publicity surrounding the publication—including Klitgaard’s newspaper interviews and autobiographical piece—an “impressive media event” and “mythmaking.”

---

35 Mow., “Min Bog var for mig Knald eller Fald—siger Mogens Klitgaard.” With Schadenfreude one interviewer for a conservative newspaper asked Klitgaard whether the book’s good reception had not disappointed him since the book dealt with those who never got far in spite of all their struggles and abilities. The interviewer then had “the unconditional satisfaction” of seeing the author begin mumbling when he asked the further question as to whether the book’s success must not be a “loathsome fiasco” for him. B, “Ligefremt Interview: Virkelig Romantik i Hverdagslivet.”

36 Mow., “Min Bog var for mig Knald eller Fald—siger Mogens Klitgaard.”

37 Carit Andersen, “Mogens Klitgaard” at 18, 5; Jaurnow, Den lyse vagabond at 77.

38 Jaurnow, Den lyse vagabond at 78-79, 83.

39 Susanne Oddsson Arnason, “Den regulerede jungle: Mogens Klitgaards Der sidder en Mand i en Sporvogn og Elly Petersen,” in xix
In his review, "Promising Debut Novel," in the influential daily Politiken, the highly respected literary critic Christian Rimestad called the author a "young man with Talent! Mogens Klitgaard has powers of observation, a sense of humor of a bitter, sarcastic kind, an ability to make a plan and carry it out so that everything develops logically: not with the author’s private, preconceived logic, but with life’s own inexorable necessity—and for that . . . psychological fantasy is demanded . . . ."40

Both mentor and mentee must have been especially pleased with the very enthusiastic review that Hans Kirk published in the Communist Party’s Arbejderbladet. Under the title “Vigorous Realism,” he stressed that it was rare for the author of a first novel to combine such “penetrating psychological acumen with a social overview.” Behind the “dissecting realism” could be sensed a “restrained humanity,” a “hidden sympathy” for the people who are so bad off, and an unobtrusive humor. Kirk also praised Klitgaard for the exemplary manner in which he worked with the modern novel technique that John Dos Passos and Alfred Döblin had created and that enabled him to place the central characters in the middle of a city and an epoch. To those who would predictably object that the book was too depressing Kirk replied:

But after all, that’s the way it is, and this family’s fate is typical. We’ve met former dry-goods merchant August Lundegaard many many times, on the trolley, on the street, and other places in life. After we’ve read Klitgaard’s book, we understand him better. He’s a person who’s ground down by a development he’s not the master of. Capitalism has made him into an economic and moral bankrupt, and one owes it to him

---


not to blather his fate into sentimentality.41

The following year, in a review of Klitgaard’s next novel, which he praised for its charm and “humoristic elegiac” treatment of the lifelong consequences of petty-bourgeois upbringing, Kirk went so far as to speculate that “if Klitgaard had seized the opportunity, he would have become the favorite of reactionary criticism.”42 As a later literary historian formulated it: “If conservative, social-democratic, and communist critics of the ’30s could not agree on anything else, in any case they could all see that Mogens Klitgaard was an unusual author, who deserved much praise.”43

Klitgaard himself attributed the popular acceptance of There’s a Man Sitting on a Trolley’s to its focus on a current problem: “[Y]ou can’t walk down a street without seeing that notorious little sign For Rent, and you never think what led up to the sign’s being put up and what’s become of those people?”44


43Hans Rømeling, “Den lille mand” i 30’ernes litteratur belyst gennem udvalgte værker 100 (Copenhagen: Studenterrådet, 1974).

44B, “Ligefremt Interview: Virkelig Romantik i Hverdagslivet.”
Introduction

In spite of Klitgaard's statement to an interviewer immediately after the book's publication that at the moment he had no plans for a new book, that new events would perhaps have to intervene in his life before he wrote the next one, and that restoring his health was his main objective, he spent much time in late 1937 working on a film adaptation of the novel, which was never produced. Then, in quick succession, Klitgaard published: in 1938, his aforementioned semi-autobiographical novel; in 1940, two anti-heroic, social-historical novels focusing on the lives of ordinary everyday people—one of which, Ballade paa Nytorv (Hullabaloo in Nytorv), takes place in Copenhagen about the time of Frederik V's death in 1766, and the other, De røde Fjer (The Red Feathers), in 1807, at the time of the British bombardment of Copenhagen during the Napoleonic wars—which required significant original research and were designed to shed light on contemporary life; in 1941, Elly Petersen, the first novel ever commissioned to be read on Danish state radio, a story, inspired by his wife's own life, about a young woman's move from the provinces to Copenhagen to seek her luck (which was made into a film in 1944); and in 1942, Den guddommelige Hverdag (The Divine Weekday), a kaleidoscopic, experimental novel with documentary montages of actual newspaper articles and advertisements about Copenhagen during the German occupation.

---

45Mow., "Min Bog var for mig Knald eller Fald—siger Mogens Klitgaard."
46Jauernow, Den lyse vagabond at 80-83.
47Mogens Klitgaard, De røde Fjer (Copenhagen: Povl Branner, 1940); Mogens Klitgaard, Ballade paa Nytorv (Copenhagen: Povl Branner, 1940); Jauernow, Den lyse vagabond at 100.
49Mogens Klitgaard, Den guddommelige hverdag (Copenhagen: Carit Andersen, 1975 [1942]). The literary historian lb Bondebjerg
On August 29, 1943, the day on which Nazi Germany, which had been occupying Denmark since April 9, 1940, dissolved the Danish government, Klitgaard, who had been in the limelight as former secretary of Røde Hjælp and a member of the board of directors of the newly formed authors organization Forfatterbundet, was in North Zealand; instead of returning to Copenhagen, he fled to Sweden, thus avoiding the fate of other board members who were interned by the Gestapo. He lived there, joined half a year later by his wife and young son, until the liberation of Denmark in May 1945. While there he wrote a manuscript for a semi-documentary film about the wartime occupation struggle in Denmark, which was bought by the Svensk Filmindustri, but never produced.  

Soon after his return to Denmark he published on two consecutive days a lengthy opinion piece in the Danish Communist Party newspaper on recent trends in the development of individualism, which he contrasted unfavorably with Marxism. His years of vagabondage had, however, taken their toll: after a year's illness in Sweden, the recurrence of tuberculosis led to the removal in the summer of one of his kidneys; shortly thereafter he died of tuberculosis of the heart at a hospital in Aarhus on 

Introduction

found it “amazing” that this allegory about the resistance movement slipped past the censorship. Dansk litteraturhistorie, vol. 7: Demokrati og kulturkamp 1901-45, at 434.


Introduction

December 23, 1945, at the age of thirty-nine.52

The death of such an energetic author at such a young age might prompt regret concerning all the novels that were lost to the world. But Klitgaard might never have written any more books anyway. Although in Sweden he had begun to rework the film manuscript as a novel (Det nye fædreland), on his return to Denmark he concluded that there were more important things to do than write or even read novels about a world that had been totally turned upside down and had silenced him. He abandoned the manuscript and imagined becoming a journalist travelling around Europe, meeting people, understanding their problems, and contributing to the discussion about reconstruction.53 With his sharp eye for the tragic and absurd, Klitgaard would doubtless have become an excellent reporter.

To be sure, in his obituary Hans Kirk expressed the belief that it was just as certain that Klitgaard would have returned to literature, “where he belonged. It was the vagabond in him that longed for freedom after the war’s long confinement.” Specifically, Kirk suggested that Klitgaard, who “had never let go of his revolutionary Marxist convictions,” had the talent, linguistic artistry, and breadth of social view to have written “a novel of European format.”54


54Kirk, “Mogens Klitgaard.” It is difficult to reconcile Klitgaard’s political life with the claim of one obituarist that the rebellion in Klitgaard was neither directed against definite dominant forces in society nor on behalf of a struggle for a new order, but “merely in general a protest against the many kinds of pressure that society imposes on the work-a-day little man.” Emil Frederiksen, “Mogens Klitgaard død i Aarhus,” Berlingske Tidende, Dec. 24, 1945, at 3.

xxiv
II. Danish Social-Realist Novels Between the World Wars: The Growth and Organization of the White-Collar Proletariat and the Proletarianization of the Petty Bourgeoise

Danish literary historians and critics generally classify There’s a Man Sitting on a Trolley as falling within the sub-genre of 1930s literature dealing with “The Little Man.” This category includes: Kjeld Abell’s play Melodien, der blev væk (The Melody That Got Lost), which was the greatest Danish theatrical success between the wars, played to a full house for more than a year after its opening on September 6, 1935, and was viewed by the Commercial and Office Employees Union as having successfully depicted a whole class in one person; Leck Fischer’s Kontor-Mennesker (Office People); Harald Herdal’s communist Der er Noet i Vejen (There’s Something Wrong); Legetøj, H. C. Branner’s allegorical depiction of the rise of Nazism in a Copenhagen toy wholesaler’s office; as well as the German novelist Hans Fallada’s worldwide success, Kleiner Mann—was nun? (Little Man—What Now?). Nevertheless,

---

56Richard Andersen, Danmark i 30’rne: En historisk mosaik 74 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968).
57Gustav Pedersen, Bogen om handels- og kontormedhjælperne og deres organisation 299 (N.p.: Dansk Handels- og Kontormedhjælperforbund, n.d [1950]).
58Leck Fischer, Kontor-Mennesker (Copenhagen: Busck, 1933).
59Harald Herdal, Der er Noet i Vejen (N.p.: Funkis, 1936).
60H. C. Branner, Legetøj (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1967 [1936]).
61Hans Fallada, Kleiner Mann—Was nun? (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1932); Hans Fallada, Little Man, What Now? (Tr. Eric Sutton; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1933). To call There’s a Man Sitting on a Trolley
within this group of urban realists, Klitgaard’s emphasis is somewhat different.

Larsen, the main character in Abell’s play, quickly became the Danish embodiment of “the little man” who is employed in society’s distributive and administrative entities at a low wage and “at some point or another in his life is confronted with the contradiction between his bourgeoisie complex and his standard of living.” “The Little Man” literature focuses on the Great Depression’s impact on the low-paid nonmanual white-collar

“a fashion in the style of Hans Fallada” is unfair because the latter’s stupendous sales are inseparable from its maudlin love story, which is totally alien to all of Klitgaard’s works. Dansk litteratur historie, vol. 4: Fra Tom Kristensen til Klaus Rifbjerg 158 (Copenhagen: Politiken, 1966). For a dissection of the romantic and apolitical idealism of Fallada’s book, see Romeling, “Den lille mand” i 30’ernes litteratur at 10-32. In its first month more than 40,000 copies of the Danish translation of Fallada’s book were sold, “an almost unheard of print run for the time. People who otherwise did not read books had to get hold of it and they escaped into its sentimental dreamland.” Andersen, Danmark i 30’rne at 75. Total sales during the 1930s amounted to 46,000 copies. Erland Munch-Petersen, “Bestseller-begrebet om masselæsning i mellemkrigstiden,” in Litteratur og samfund i mellemkrigstiden: Litteratursociologiske studier 194-213 at 206 (Carl Erik Bay and John Chr. Jørgensen eds.; Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1979.) The white-collar workers union reviewed the Danish translation, noting that “the book’s conclusion that two people’s love for each other becomes their good fortune does not solve the problem of how they are going to free themselves of their social misery and get food the next day. . . .” Jonna Duch Christensen and Søren Federspiel, Fra flipproletar til løn­arbejder: HKs historie 1900-2000, at 69 (N.p.: HK, 2000) (citing Dansk Handels- og Kontormedhjælper Tidende (Dec. 1933)).

To be sure, Abell’s play was not realism. For an earlier American expressionist play on a similar theme with a bleak conclusion, see Elmer Rice, The Adding Machine (Garden City: Doubleday, 1923).

worker—or, in the contemporaneously coined term, “white-collar proletariat” (*Flipproletariat*)—in offices and stores whose working conditions and lives are revealed to be subject to the same ruthless capitalist forces generating insecurity, anxiety, alienation, and, ultimately, impoverishment as industrial workers’. At the same time, this stratum had to pay for its lower risk of unemployment during the Depression with salary cuts.

The huge absolute and relative increase in the number of white-collar workers in Denmark in the twentieth century lay behind this development: from 1901 to 1940, the number of salaried employees in the trade sector rose 530 percent compared with an increase of 66 percent in the total labor force. This

---

64 In Branner’s office novel, which appeared one year before Klitgaard’s, the worst insult a communist can hurl at a co-worker in a packing and shipping department who has been coopted into an informant job on a monthly salary (with a modest increase) is *flipproletar*. Branner, *Legetøj* at 60. The word itself, modeled after the German *Stehkragenproletariat*, points to the job requirement of wearing a shirt with a detachable collar.


66 Calculated according to: Hans Christian Johansen, *Dansk økonomisk statistik 1814-1980*, tab. 1.5c at 122, in *Danmarks historie*, vol. 9 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1985); Svend Aage Hansen, *Økonomisk vækst i Danmark*, vol. II: 1914-1970, tab. 1 at 203-204 (Copenhagen: Akademisk forlag, 1974). The white-collar category in the first source is incorrectly defined as including public servants in the trade sector. According to a different source, the number of salaried employees in all sectors rose 76 percent between 1921 and 1940, while that in trade rose 117 percent and the entire labor force expanded by only 43 percent. During those decades, salaried employees increased their share of the total labor force from 17 to 21 percent, while salaried employees in the trade sector increased theirs from 5 to 8 percent. Svend Aage Hansen and Ingrid Henriksen, *Sociale brydninger 1914-39*, tab. 20 at 336, in
growth dissolved the earlier patriarchal workplace relations and, reinforced by office mechanization, created many more subordinate white-collar positions. Office work—which in its modern form was introduced into Denmark around the turn of the century by English and U.S. multinational firms such as the Vacuum Oil Company—was predominantly a Copenhagen phenomenon: at the time of the 1930 census, 61 percent of Denmark’s 17,658 office workers were found there.

The general political and social debate sparked by “The Little Man” literature, in the view of the Commercial and Office Employees Union (Dansk Handels- og Kontormedhjælperforbund), helped promote the increase in unionization during the following years. Indeed, the so-called Larsen discussion and the fear of a leftist turn toward unionization by shop and office workers—in 1932 the white-collar workers union had itself taken

---

67Christensen and Federspiel, Fra Jlipproletar til lønarbejder at 11.
68Danmarks Statistik, Statistisk Aarbog 1938, tab. 13 at 18-19 (Copenhagen: Bianco Luno, 1938). This proportion was down from 68 percent at the time of the 1921 census, when there were 10,903 office workers. Danmarks Statistik, Statistisk Aarbog 1932, tab. 8 at 14-15 (Copenhagen: Thiele, 1932).
69For examples that took place during 1936, the year Klitgaard’s novel depicts, see “Melodien skal findes til Larsen,” Politiken, Jan. 1, 1936, at 25:1-6; 26:1-6; “Larsen og Organisationen,” Politiken, Jan. 7, 1936, at 4:1-2. In the latter contribution, Gustav Pedersen, the future chairman of the white-collar workers union, insisted that as long as office and store workers were unable to cover their modest expenses, the wage question remained paramount.
70Christensen and Federspiel, Fra Jlipproletar til lønarbejder at 69.
a major step toward working-class unity by joining the social-democratic national union umbrella federation (De samvirkende Fagforbund)—caused the chief party representing urban employers, the Conservative People’s Party, to propose a law in May 1937 to provide legal protections to nonunion white-collar workers in an effort to sustain their identity as an intermediate stratum separate from the working class. The Commercial and Office Employees Union and the Social Democratic Party did not support the proposal because they feared that it might lessen the perceived need to join the union, but when the Social Democrats’ government coalition allies, Det radikale Venstre (Social Liberals), which competed with the Conservatives for “middle-class” votes, showed interest in the proposal, the union and the Social Democrats regained the initiative by rewriting the law to give additional protections to all private-sector white-collar employees. Among other things, the law, which was enacted in 1938 (and is still in force with amendments) gave private-sector white-collar workers a three-month notice period after six months’ employment and up to a maximum of six months’ notice after an additional nine years of employment.71

71Pedersen, Bogen om handels- og kontormedhjælperne og deres organisation at 276-95 (Pedersen, chairman of the union and a Social Democratic member of parliament, was the principal drafter of the final statute); Christensen and Federspiel, Fra flipp proletar til lønarbejder at 74; Lov Nr. 168 af 13 April 1938 om Retsforholdet mellem Arbejdsgivere og Funktionærer i private Erhvervsvirksomheder, sect. 2, in Lovtidende for Aaret 1938, at 719 (Copenhagen: Schultz, 1939); Walter Galenson, The Danish System of Labor Relations: A Study in Industrial Peace 256-60 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952). Section 1 of the law defined covered private salaried employees (Funktionærer) as commercial or office workers employed in buying or selling or in office or warehouse work. On the complex conflicts over the law within the Conservative Party and between this party and employers, see Carl Gustav Johansen, “Funktionærlovens forhistorie
Klitgaard’s focus is not so much on white-collar workers as on the proletarianization of a petty-bourgeois dry-goods store owner, August Lundegaard, who is forced into white-collar employment as a bill collector for a men’s installment-plan clothing business after competition with large department stores bankrupts his little store. To be sure, to the extent that the proletarianization of small store owners increased the supply of and intensified competition among white-collar workers in the trade sector, whose chances of becoming proprietors themselves were accordingly diminished, these two phenomena were interlocked. Lundegaard himself belonged to a transition period: fifty years old at the time of the novel in 1936, he was part of the generation of shop salesmen who had completed their apprenticeships before World War I and could, with the aid of considerable self-exploitation and exploitation of their wives and children, realistically expect to own their own stores.

But by the 1920s there was an explosion of criticism of the irrational system of retail distribution with its oversupply of proprietors whose hours of actual productive work amounted to semi-unemployment and who scraped by behind a shield of local

---

Novelist Tom Kristensen’s claim that this character is “not a hero, he’s not competent. He’s like all the rest of us. Goes down in crises and goes up in prosperity,” captures an aspect of August Lundegaard, but erases the socioeconomic and historical rootedness of Klitgaard’s account. Tom Kristensen, “Den lyse Vagabond, Mogens Klitgaard død,” Politiken, Dec. 24, 1945.

Pedersen, Bogen om handels- og kontormedhjælperne og deres organisation at 14-23. By 1936 Lundegaard had been married for 25 years and had apparently owned the store for at least that long, that is, since 1911; in any event, he and the store prospered during World War I. See below pp. 2-3, 36-37.
Introduction

monopoly by charging high mark-ups to consumers.\textsuperscript{74} The presence of a significant stratum of “small, poorly educated merchants” had led Danish observers even before the Depression of the 1930s to identify them as a “proletariat.”\textsuperscript{75} By the time of the Depression, a proletariat of the unemployed was even flowing into this sector as the relatively minimal start-up costs of a small store prompted some of the growing number of unemployed workers to open shops in an attempt to make ends meet.\textsuperscript{76} Consequently, the number of retail stores continued to rise in Copenhagen even during the Depression; with declining overall sales, the size of the stores in many branches declined too. Thus from 1925 to 1935, the number of retail establishments rose 18 percent from 17,816 to 20,985, while total sales fell 16 percent from 1,223,900,000 crowns to 1,029,100,000 crowns; thus average sales per establishment fell 29 percent from 68,697 crowns to 49,040 crowns. In several branches with the largest number of establishments, the rate of increase considerably exceeded the overall average. Thus the number of establishments selling tobacco and wine rose 26 percent, bread and milk 36 percent, and fruits, vegetables, and flowers 45 percent—all branches in which total sales either fell strongly or were stationary over the ten-year period.\textsuperscript{77}

Many of these Copenhagen store owners fit C. Wright Mills’s category—which is applicable beyond the U.S. context in which he developed it—of the “true lumpen-bourgeoisie” who “employ no workers at all: the proprietors and their family mem-

\textsuperscript{74}Hansen and Henriksen, \textit{Sociale brydninger 1914-39}, at 156-58.
\textsuperscript{75}Jens Warming, \textit{Danmarks Erhvervs- og Samfundsliv: En Lærebog i Danmarks Statistik} 348 (Copenhagen: Gad, 1930).
bers do the work, frequently sweating themselves night and day. At the bottom of the depression, the ‘proprietor’s withdrawal’ was liberally estimated at $9.00 a week for stores with sales under $10,000. Here, at the bottom of the twentieth-century business world, lies the owner-operator who, in the classic image, is the independent man in the city.”

Although Klitgaard once described Lundegaard as a “common denominator for a definite male type in Copenhagen,” he was acutely aware that Lundegaard was “the type one runs into in all countries. It’s the middle class that’s disappearing.” Even the Lundegaards of the world could sense that they were being deprived of the platform they had been standing on. In fact, they sensed it especially keenly because they “are disposed to think individualistically and therefore can’t link up with the working class’s collectivity.”

Some literary historians have distinguished between critical and socialist realism in the 1930s literature. Because Klitgaard does not build an explicitly socialist perspective into his critique of capitalist society and focuses on an intermediate petty-bourgeois stratum rather than on the working class, he has been viewed as pursuing a “registering realism that describes a powerlessness” and is therefore inclined to seek “general, abstract, or individual paths.” The attempt by the central figure in the novel to salvage a new identity for himself in his new individualistic job as bill collector is seen as a prime illustration of this more “directionless” approach. Yet this analysis per se condemns to

---


79Houmark, “Daarligt egnet til at møde Livet.”

80B, “Ligefremt Interview: Virkelig Romantik i Hverdagslivet.”

81Ib Bondebjerg, *Proletarisk offentlighed*, vol. 2: *Arbejderoffentlighed og arbejderlitteratur i Danmark 1924-1939*, at 117-18 (Copenhagen: Medusa, 1979). In a somewhat different formulation in another piece published the same year, Bondebjerg tried to illustrate critical
an inferior level of literature any novel about the petty bourgeoisie that fails to culminate in a rousing appeal to collective forms of struggle no matter how unmediated that call may be.\footnote{Since Bondebjerg expressly refers to the novelist Harald Herdal as a socialist realist, it is worth noting that his novel about office workers—who are after all not petty bourgeois—ends in precisely such an appeal when the main character in the book’s final sentence, after confessing that he does not know what is to be done, asks himself: “Organize myself the way the workers have?” Herdal, Der er Noet i Vejen at 128.} However, Klitgaard’s critical, sympathetic, lyrical, and yet “satirical realism,”\footnote{\textit{A History of Danish Literature} 178 (Sven Rossel ed.; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992) (by Nils Ingwersen).} which shows how fruitless and absurdly tragicomic efforts at individualistic solutions are in a period of depression, is no less legitimate a social insight than novels that expressly call for collective solutions. Moreover, such appeals would have been incompatible with Klitgaard’s effort to “unmask the little man and fight for him” and his “consummate feat” of forcing the great reading public that otherwise preferred the banal dream-world of the weeklies’ novelettes to confront hard and depressing reality’s tendency toward a psychological-humanistic critique that turns away from society and toward the individual by making the implausible if not preposterous claim that Klitgaard’s “novel after all points to a solution for the petty bourgeois, which invites him to find his way to his lost nature and realize himself as an authentic human being.” Ib Bondebjerg, “Kritisk realisme og socialistisk realisme: Tendenser i realismen og den socialistiske litteraturdebatt i mellemkrigstiden,” in \textit{Litteratur og samfund i mellemkrigstiden} at 214-51 at 247. It is difficult to fathom how Klitgaard can be imagined as offering a “solution” in the character Lundegaard’s escape into the woods for a few hours. Jaurnow, “Efterskrift” at 198-99, narrowly defines critical realism as emphasizing “the conflict between individual and society with the pessimistic conclusion that society undermines the individual’s personality and inhibits its possibilities in life.”
Introduction

realities.84

The claim—advanced by the editor of a popular paperback edition of There’s a Man Sitting on a Trolley—that Klitgaard merely puts a “resigned question mark” next to the issue of whether there are “collectively or ideologically based solutions to life’s problems”85 is, therefore, untenable. Klitgaard was not writing about “life’s problems,” but about whether there was an individualistic way out for the petty bourgeoisie undergoing proletarianization during the Depression; and to this question he provided an unambiguous answer. Even if the ambit of the novel is expanded to include the problems of the worker-characters, Klitgaard was not denying the efficacy of collective solutions, but highlighting the hopelessness of individual action. In fact, There’s a Man Sitting on a Trolley can plausibly be viewed as a “reckoning with the interwar petty bourgeoisie, which economically and socially belonged to the proletariat, but which psychologically and ideologically were middle-class people.”86

Leek Fischer had chosen as the title-page epigram for his novel Kontor-Mennesker: “Can you live on being educated?” In a polemical response to Fischer’s chiefly psychological-moral study, the title page to communist Harald Herdal’s schematic Der er Noet i Vejen bore the epigram: “It’s not so much the question of whether you can live on being educated, but the question of whether you can live without being organized!” In contrast, Klitgaard invests his characters with real psychological traits without imposing an agenda on them. Interestingly, he told one interviewer that the reviewers had not noticed that: “My book has a happy end. Through his struggles Lundegaard has attained

84Neergaard, Mogens Klitgaard at 31, 13.
86Rømeling, “Den lille mand” i 30’ernes litteratur at 107-108.
more humanity. Ibsen's moral is that you shouldn't take the lie from a human being. But life takes it from them!87

No matter who Klitgaard's fictional characters were, the city of Copenhagen, which both repelled and fascinated him, was a—if not the—main character of all his novels.88 The twelve chapters of There's a Man Sitting on a Trolley introduce the natural and social seasonal rhythms through each month of the year 1936 in a metropolis that has alienated its residents from the nature that surrounds them. Klitgaard's novel offers what remains perhaps the most evocative contemporaneous panorama of the city's bleak working-class slum life during the Great Depression.89 During the 1930s Greater Copenhagen's population, largely by virtue of migration from rural areas, grew by 30 percent.90 Moreover, the rate of unemployment in Denmark had been high even in the 1920s: between 1930 and 1939, the rate varied from a low of 13.7 percent in 1930 to a high of 31.7 percent in 1932, whereas the fluctuation between 1925 and 1929 ranged between 14.7 percent and 22.5 percent. As an "ineradicable social evil," unemployment came to attract more attention than any other subject during the 1920s. In Copenhagen, the average unemployment rate was 15.9 percent between 1925 and

87B, "Ligefremt Interview: Virkelig Romantik i Hverdagslivet." Klitgaard used the English expression "happy end."


89For a contrasting contemporaneous American account of Denmark bubbling with cheerfulness and praise of virtually every aspect of life in Copenhagen, see Agnes Rothery, Denmark: Kingdom of Reason (New York: Viking, 1937).

90Svend Aage Hansen and Ingrid Henriksen, Sociale brydninger 1914-39, at 327, in Dansk social historie, vol. 6 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1980).
Introduction

1929 and 20.0 per cent between 1930 and 1934.91

In his 1941 novel Elly Petersen, which tells the story of a sixteen-year-old girl from northern Jutland who travels to Copenhagen to work as a chambermaid in a boarding house, Klitgaard programmatically depicted the city as a people-making and -breaking machine:

Surrounded by woods, water, and flat fields lies Copenhagen, the provincials’ biggest city. The city where more Jutlanders live than in Århus. The city whose public life is stamped to a higher degree by people who have moved from the provinces than it is stamped by Copenhageners, a large paved expanse in a corner of Denmark, which sucks in streams from all sides, streams of people, who are seeking a tolerable existence and find a hard world following other rules than the ones they came from. The provincials’ city. The city that contains a fourth of the country’s inhabitants. The city whose glitter shines across the country and attracts the mills, a grinding machine that pulverizes some to death and creates a new existence for some.92

---

91Johansen, Dansk økonomisk statistik 1814-1980, tab. 7.3 at 289-90; Københavns statistiske Kontor, Statistisk Aarbog for København, Frederiksberg og Gjentofte Kommune 1936-1937, tab. 185 at 140-41; Hansen and Henriksen, Sociale brydninger 1914-39, at 130 (quote). Because the members of unemployment insurance funds were largely trade unionists, Danish unemployment statistics were undercounts. To give some sense of the possible discrepancy, in 1936, when the rate of insured unemployment was 19.3 percent, the rate of unemployment among union members in the United States was 13.3 percent, while the total unemployment rate was 16.9 percent. F. Zeuthen, Arbejdsløn og Arbejdsløshed 246 (Copenhagen: Busck, 1939); U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, Pt. 1, D-85-86 at 135 (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1975).

92Klitgaard, Elly Petersen at 21.
Introduction

III. There's a Man Sitting on a Trolley Sixty-Five Years On

Although several of Klitgaard’s novels have been translated into German, French, Swedish, and Dutch,93 none of his works has appeared in English before now.94 *There’s a Man Sitting on a Trolley* has retained the interest of Danish readers: not only did the leading literary publishing house, Gyldendal, republish it in paperback editions in 1970 and 1985, but in 1997 the Danish Teachers Association published a special annotated paperback edition with a long afterword by Leon Jaurnow, whose biography of Klitgaard will appear soon.

In a review of that latest edition, novelist and critic Mette Winge observed that if one mentioned the name Mogens Klitgaard to Danes, most answered: Mogens who? But if one mentioned the title of the book that had made him a name in the summer of 1937, most people said: Oh, him and that book—because many remember the title even if they do not know the novel. Winge also welcomed the annotations to the new edition because the book contains many allusions, persons, and circumstances that have leaked away from Danish collective memory especially among young people. Winge ironically noted that the word “trolley” was not included in the annotations.95

---

93 *Dansk skønlitterært forfatterleksikon*, vol. II: 1900-1950, at 125 (Svend Dahl ed.; Copenhagen: Pedersen, 1960), lists a Swedish and a Dutch translation of *There's a Man Sitting on a Trolley*, but only the former could be bibliographically confirmed.

94 In an anthology of Danish literature edited by Elias Bredsdorff, the first chapter of *There’s a Man Sitting on a Trolley* was translated by J.F.S. Pearce, one of Bredsdorff’s students. Mogens Klitgaard, “The Nineteen Thirties,” in *Contemporary Danish Prose: An Anthology* 302-14 (Elias Bredsdorff ed.; Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1958).

**Introduction**

Because non-Danish readers will not be familiar with most of the novel’s cultural, geographic, historical, and institutional references, an extensive apparatus of annotations is provided at the back. They include, for the first time ever, precise references to the daily newspaper articles that are the sources of many of Klitgaard’s montage-like insertions of real headlines and information. Klitgaard adapted this technique from John Dos Passos’s novels with what one critic has called a “special Danish tone: an unobtrusive indignation with an admixture of a touch of tragicomedy.”

---

A Note on the Text


A Note on the Cover

The drawing reproduced on the cover was an inspiration to Klitgaard while writing the novel. It had appeared a few months earlier in the June 1936 issue of *Kulturkampen*, a journal which was part of the left-wing political and cultural circles in which he traveled. “The Trolley Conductor” by Arne Ungermann (1902-1981) bore a caption that Klitgaard took as seriously as the drawing itself: “Why should life today not be as good a motif as in Breughel’s time?”

Klitgaard fastened the drawing with thumbtacks to the wall over his desk and was forced to look at it every time he looked up from his typewriter. A year and a half after the book’s appearance, Klitgaard, who still had Ungermann’s drawing hanging on his wall, explained its significance for him:

When I look at his trolley passengers’ faces, the worker with the thermos bottle sticking up out of his pocket on the way home from eight hours’ toil at a construction site, the retail dealer who can’t find the money for his expenses, the office worker with the pants and elbows shiny from use, I can’t help thinking that people’s lives have never been as impoverished and monotonous as today. That the Stone Age man’s existence was fuller.

And still. Something is lurking in the eyes in Ungermann’s real-

---

istic faces. Something unconquerable. A stubborn optimism. A quiet force that has survived all periods of oppression, all wars, all thraldom. An irresistible will to live that will survive all the calamities the future appears to hold in store.

From my room in Esrom Abbey I can see down into the abbey garden where the children are playing. They have the same thing in their eyes, the same force. If they escape the airplanes’ bombs, in fifteen years they’ll be trolley passengers, laborers, retail dealers, office workers. The dimples will disappear, but the unconquerability, the eyes’ stubborn optimism, the need to make life better, will remain.2

Klitgaard did not think of the title, which is a sentence in the book introducing a description of the central character and one of the figures in Ungermann’s drawing,3 until after he had finished writing the book. In response to an interviewer’s question about whether the title was artificial, Klitgaard insisted that the


3See below p. 45. Ironically, the cover of Gyldendal’s 1970 edition of Der sidder en Mand i en Sporvogn used Ungermann’s drawing, but totally obscured the thermos bottle with a band containing Klitgaard’s name and the book title, even though the novel discusses the thermos (see below p. 46).
book could not have been called anything else. The title underscores that the main character is an incidental, anonymous individual from big city daily life; nevertheless, Klitgaard’s interest in the impact of the overarching socioeconomic conditions does not lead him to treat August Lundegaard as devoid of specific psychological qualities.


Acknowledgments

For reasons that may never be understood, Gitte Gaarsvig Sørensen, as with previous translations, never once even came close to losing her patience or sense of humor in responding to a never-ending flow of transatlantic email questions. Inga Klitgaard provided the photo of her husband and additional information about him. Leon Jaurnow generously made available his forthcoming biography of Klitgaard and his extensive knowledge of the text of the novel and its background. Elias Bredsdorff shared his personal knowledge of his friend Mogens Klitgaard and of Copenhagen in the 1930s. Research librarians Morten Thing (Roskilde Universitetsbibliotek) and Carl Erik Bay (Det Kongelige Bibliotek) answered dozens of questions about Danish institutions in the 1930s. Line Schmidt-Madsen generously authorized use of her father’s drawing on the cover and answered questions about Copenhagen in the 1930s. Mary Rumsey at the University of Minnesota Law Library almost instantaneously provided copies of Danish statutes. Eva Nancke at the Arbejderbevægelsens Bibliotek og Arkiv quickly, expertly, and enthusiastically identified, located, and shipped books and articles unavailable in the United States in addition to tracking down information on obscure aspects of Danish labor history. Esthi Kunz at Gyldendal faxed a copy of an otherwise unavailable essay. John McLeod explained Danish card terms. Helli Skærbak, librarian at Roskilde Universitetsbibliotek, provided copies of otherwise unavailable newspaper articles. Attorney Thomas Lemvig clarified a question of Danish labor law. Lau Sander Esbensen provided background information about Dr. Jonathan Leunbach. Else D’Angelo, Jan Jensen, and Pastor Frederik Jensen explained a number of Danish terms. Bob Ramsey (University of Iowa) helped scan in images, while Schuyler Rahe-Dingbaum worked on the cover design. Poet Jan Weissmiller,
Acknowledgments

in addition to operating her You-Call-This-English? email service, once again generously and painstakingly edited the manuscript, while Marjorie Rahe constituted the critical one-person audience for a dramatic reading of the final draft.

The map of Copenhagen at pages lxvi-lxvii is used with permission of the Danish Tourist Board in New York City.
Cast of Characters

August Lundegaard—bill collector/former dry-goods merchant
Poul Lundegaard—August’s son
Anna Lundegaard—August’s daughter
Mrs. Lundegaard—August’s wife
Nielsen—billiard scorekeeper/former clerical worker
Mr. Salomonsen—landlord and moneylender
Girl in the mauve outfit—prostitute frequented by Lundegaard
Sister Rebekka—Nazarene
Olsen—billiard player
Svendsen—billiard player
Svendsen’s wife
Andersen—billiard player
Musician—billiard player
Hansen—bookkeeper at firm where Lundegaard works
Lundegaard’s boss at the men’s clothing business
Jensen—August Lundegaard’s old army buddy
Eigil Holm—warehouse clerk and Anna’s boyfriend
Health insurance fund doctor
News dealer—Lundegaard’s neighbor and a communist
Former customer of Lundegaard’s
Barber
Truck driver making delivery to barber
Mrs. Salomonsen
Female employee of lawyer who collects Lundegaard’s rent
Agent of Fabric Warehouse
Department head of Fabric Warehouse
Appraiser at state pawnbrokerage
Berg—restaurant owner at billiard parlor
Bar girl
Frants—little old man who sells razor blades in taverns
Andresen—worker Lundegaard tries to collect debt from
Cast of Characters

Unemployed machinist at Sundby beach
Female office worker at Fabric Warehouse
Lundegaard’s brother-in-law
Motorcyclist—Anna’s new boyfriend
Encyclopedia salesman
Carlsen—man Lundegaard served apprenticeship with
Sonja—seventeen-year-old Eigil Holm goes out with
Lundegaard’s brother
Lundegaard’s brother’s wife
Taxi driver
THERE’S A MAN SITTING ON A TROLLEY