

Cherchez la femme or How Gendered Are Estonian Literary Histories and Handbooks?

Estonian literary history is full of women, as every Estonian will tell you. The singers of the folksongs of the past centuries – mostly women (nameless as usual with oral poetry). The national poet, the hero of the romantic poetry in the 19th century – a woman whose portrait is on the most common Estonian banknote (Lydia Koidula). The beloved heroine of the emotional and erotic poetry of the early 20th century – a woman, who was proposed for the Nobel Prize in Literature eight times (without ever receiving it, but no Estonian has ever received it; Marie Under). The intellectual consciousness of the 1930s – a woman (Betti Alver). The queen of Estonian children's literature – a woman (Ellen Niit). The sober analyst of the suffocating post-war Stalin years – a woman (Viivi Luik). The best-selling poetry writer of the early 21st century – a woman (Doris Kareva). So where is the problem?

I cannot and will not deny the fact that women indeed play an important role throughout the entire history of Estonian literature and that this fact is also well documented in the respective literary histories. And I even will not rule out the possibility that the role of Estonian women within their literature is larger than that of other nations' women in the respective literatures – but that is not the point I want to make here.

What I want to know is whether the strong position of women holds true when we look at the whole picture. For if we assume that every literary history is a mirror of its time, then we should also find the main patterns of behaviour, power and hierarchies of a given society in the constructed literary history of this given society. And there is one thing for sure: Estonian society was strongly patriarchal in the past centuries, including the so-called socialist period. Even in the middle of the 1990s an outstanding female politician stated in an

interview that Estonia is not yet ripe for a female president (Lauristin 1995: 23). Therefore one can assume that Estonian literary histories would show traces of the patriarchal society in the sense that the female part of the history has been neglected.

This is the deductive approach triggered by the call for papers for this conference, where the following question was posed: 'Should the existing histories of literature be rewritten on the ground of feminist cultural criticism?'

The inductive approach was triggered by personal experience: when nine years ago a new comprehensive history of Estonian literature appeared (Annus et al. 2001) – written by a group of six outstanding specialists in Estonian literature, 700 pages thick and assumed to be the first ideology-free literary history since 50 years – I was very disappointed to learn that one of my favourite writers was not included. She was by then fifty years old, her *début* dated back to 1983, she had published several books of verse and prose and two novels and received the prestigious Tuglas-prize in 1994 – so why was Eeva Park not included in this new handbook?

That is how the suspicion was born that in some cases non-literary criteria have been used to eliminate certain writers from the canonical books, the most prominent being the sex of the person. Unfortunately this is something very hard to prove, as those mechanisms are never made explicit. The reason for this is that sexism is officially banned, like racism or discrimination on the basis of religion. But the simple hypothesis, based on the above-mentioned analogy, should be clear: if societies are patriarchal, so will be their literary histories.

How can we find evidence for this hypothesis?

The problem is that it is always easy to find exceptions and counter-examples, and it is generally hard to argue against the one or in favour of the other. If you want to find arguments you have to develop a certain framework which enables one to measure the differences applied in the treatment of either men or women. We have to find parameters which are neutral enough to be measurable at all. They need not be purely quantitative, though one thing is sure: size matters, and it is certainly a difference whether you get four or fourteen or forty lines in a literary handbook, and whether there is a picture added or not. But there are other aspects, too. Generally

speaking there are four methods to eliminate the female part of our world. These are:

ignoring them, i.e. just forgetting to mention them at all;
marginalizing them, i.e. putting them in a marginal position, making them passive instead of active and the like;
appending them to a male part, i.e. describing them as part of something, not as something *an sich*; and
diminishing or trivializing them, i.e. making them smaller than they really are, making them ridiculous or not to be taken seriously.

I will now have a closer look at the first three of these four parameters and try to find some evidence or counterevidence for it in the field of Estonian literature, more exactly: in the literary field of Estonia.

The first solution – *ignoring* – is the simplest one. I would call this the Stalinist version: no people, no problems. If men simply deny the existence of women and do not mention them at all, then no-one will bother about them and leave the literary field to men. Of course it is difficult to show something that is not present, but we have some possibilities.

Each compilation of a literary canon – such as it is presented to us in literary histories – is a selection from a larger corpus of writers and texts, based on bibliographies and handbooks and the like. It is, roughly speaking, a three level procedure. First, to get into a bibliography is not too difficult; this is mostly a purely formal step. If you have an ISBN number and a physical book most bibliographers will list you in their records. But to achieve the next step to the handbooks is something else. This depends on many factors which characterize the literary field. And one of these factors is gender. The third step, finally, is to find a place in the canonized literary histories. This is the next and ultimate challenge. Again, one of the many criteria to be applied will be the sex of the person.

I cannot give a quantitative in-depth-analysis of the complete history of Estonian letters as this is still work in progress, but I might

have some evidence for certain procedures of selection, and I will give a number of examples of the same mechanism.

The first and maybe best example is the aforementioned case of Eeva Park. She was born in 1950 and her first book was published in 1983. In order to get a representative group we need a reference sample and have to look at the surroundings: who else was born at roughly the same time and became a writer later? And what happened to them in the literary handbooks and histories of literature? According to my rather complete records of Estonian literature I came to 36 authors born between 1948 and 1952. Among them were 12 women (Karm, Kudu, Õim, Park, Rebane, Reemet, Reinla, Sool, Tael, Talviste, Tamman, Vallisoo) and 24 men (Arder, Enniko, Helme, Ilmet, Ilus, Kändler, Käsper, Koržets, Langemets, Lõhmus, Maripuu, Merenäkk, Mesilane, Novod, Ööbik, Puu, Relve, Sang, Sarv, Urm, Varblane, Vene, Viiding, Volkov), i.e. the relation was exactly one to two. They all had their *début* between 1976 and 1996. Eight of them (Arder, Ilmet, Langemets, Lõhmus, Maripuu, Sang, Vallisoo, Viiding) made it into the aforementioned latest literary history (Annus et al. 2001). Of these eight, only one is a woman (Vallisoo). So the percentage of women declined from 33 in real life to 12.5 in the canonized literary history. To me this seems significant.

But Eeva Park is not the only omission in this book. Another name missing was that of Ilmi Kolla (1933–1954) – a poet who died of tuberculosis when she was 21 and who left only one collection of poems, published posthumously. Nevertheless, her verses were something special in the stifling early 1950s, and at least one of her poems became very popular and widely known. Ilmi Kolla could be called a rather canonized author; she is included in all the three biographical handbooks of Estonian literature (EKBL, EKRL, EKL), and always with a photograph. She also received a small chapter in the monumental seven-volume literary history (EKA II: 239–240), again with a portrait, and her autograph was included in the representative collection of Estonian autographs which comprises 75 authors (Noorhane 2003: 162–163). You might think, a consolidated author. But not a trace of her in the current leading monograph on the history of Estonian literature.

And what to think about Aita Kivi: born in 1954, début with poetry in 1986, followed by half a dozen other books of both verse and short prose until the end of the century, all of them reviewed in leading journals. No traces of her in the aforementioned monograph, but we do come across her male colleagues Aado Lintrop – born in 1956, first book in 1985, second fifteen years later –, and Villu Kangur – born in 1957, first and only book in 1979. It is, of course, always easy to point to some forgotten name in a book you have not written yourself, and comparisons to other writers have always the taste of being completely arbitrary. But one should consider that all the named omissions concerned women, and somehow I doubt whether this is purely accidental. I cannot prove it, but I need not either. One can only, strictly Popperian, prove the opposite. So you have to give me the names of three or four male writers with whom happened exactly the same and then I might reconsider my point.

One level down we find the literary handbooks and biographical authors' manuals. Receiving an entry in a handbook is an achievement, but no guarantee. Canonization is accomplished only if one is accepted into the new edition of the handbook as well. If you are not good enough you might be dropped. Or if you have the wrong sex.

Estonia has a strong tradition in biographical handbooks and, generally speaking, provides good material for those interested in Estonian letters. In the last 35 years three comprehensive biographical handbooks on Estonian literature have come on the market, appearing respectively in 1975 (EKBL), 1995 (EKRL), and 2000 (EKL). The first had around 600 entries, the next one doubled this to 1,260 entries, and the latest version has 1,400 articles. Roughly speaking, one could say that once included in such a handbook you are home free, for Estonians love biographical handbooks; the larger the better. Therefore one printed book of verse is often enough for a person to be included in a handbook of Estonian writers. And with the above-mentioned tendency of ever-increasing girth, the chance is good that the future editors will not remove your name.

Nevertheless, it can turn out the other way. The last extension from 1,260 to 1,400 entries did not just add the respective number of persons, but also expunged a number of names. If you have still only one collection of verse then your position is jeopardized. That is

what obviously happened to Merike Õim, who was born in 1951 and had her first book of verse published in 1985. She was included in the 1995 lexicon (EKRL 686). But no books followed, and so she was dropped from the following edition (EKL). That is understandable and defensible; it seems logical. Not everyone can be included. But when we, then, have a look at some of her comparable male colleagues, problems arise. Consider the following lesser-known Estonian male writers:

Kalju Enniko – born in 1952 with one book from 1980 (EKRL 81, EKL 80);
 Villu Kangur (the respective years are 1957 and 1979; EKRL 180; EKL 178);
 Harri Kingo (1955/1986; EKRL 202, EKL 200);
 Mati Kuntro (1955/1989; EKRL 243; EKL 242);
 Tiit Kändler (1948/1986; EKRL 254; EKL 255).

They all made it to the 2000 edition, and this is not defensible any more, it is suspicious. Again, it is hard to prove that it was only the sex of the author that caused the selection, but the impression remains. From the 23 persons that were omitted during the editorial work at the transition from the 1995 edition to the 2000 edition, 14 were women. Although there have certainly been plausible reasons for all of them – one being the fact that folklore singers were not included any more in the new edition, and the vast majority of them were women –, the result is unmistakable, a reduction of the female part of the entire phenomenon called literature.

The second mechanism is *marginalizing* women. This means that women shift from the focus to the periphery. Instead of calling them innovators or leaders of a certain movement, they will be put into the margin, the real innovators always being male. This is a tricky thing to find any evidence for, but I might be able to produce some examples.

First of all we have the general problem – known from other languages too – that we have writers and female or woman writers. In Estonian: *kirjanikud* and *naiskirjanikud*. As Estonian has no

grammatical gender the word *kirjanik* ‘author, writer’ may denote either a woman or a man. The same holds for the word for poet, *luuletaja*, which can be a man or a woman. Consequently many female Estonian writers are simply called *kirjanik* or *luuletaja*. But some of them are called *naiskirjanik* – and one never finds a *meeskirjanik*, the respective male form. Using the prefix *nais-* suggests that the default notion, the word without the prefix, would be male. The impression remains that we have the real writers, the *kirjanikud*, they form the core literature, and then we have a subgroup, especially marked, which forms a less important part of the literature. Markedness and unmarkedness are crucial concepts in this context. By marking the female part we make the first step towards marginalizing them.

The second possibility is to simply give women less space than men. Again, size matters. Literature is not only quality, it is also very much quantity. Let us take, as an example, the poet Marie Heiberg. She lived from 1890 until 1942 and was in the years preceding the First World War a kind of wunderkind of Estonian poetry whose first volume of verse was published when she was sixteen. But later her life was overshadowed by mental illness and her literary production remained rather small. Nevertheless, she forms an important link between the poetry of the very beginning of the 20th century and that of the 1920s and 1930s. Yet Endel Nirk in his 400-page monograph on Estonian literature confines himself to one single sentence about her: “Amongst the members and satellites of this literary generation we also find the name of the poetess Marie Heiberg, whose tragic life and desperate struggle to exceed her creative potentiality cut short her career and left her a mental wreck.” (Nirk 1987: 136) No years, no title of any book, not even an attempt to describe her poetry. We have to put up with the mere mention of her name. And note, by the way, the use of the word ‘poetess’ here, whereas Marie Under is simply a poet. (Ib. 192)

But nevertheless, Marie Heiberg could certainly be labelled canonized. The academic literary history devotes seven pages to her (EKA III: 505–512), there we even find several examples of her poetry, a reproduction of her handwriting, a portrait and the frontispiece of her second volume of verse. An example of her

handwriting is also included in the above-mentioned representative book on Estonian autographs. (Noorhani 2003: 86–87). In 1988 a collection of her verses was reissued, i.e. the author is accessible and present. But in spite of these data, her position in the literary histories is unstable and fluid. While Nirk only drops her name, Arvo Mägi does not mention her at all (1968: 22 – this is the English version; Heiberg does occur in the Estonian version, Mägi 1965: 34, 55, but not in the Finnish version, 1965a), nor does Karl Ristikivi in his short account on Estonian literature (1954) or Friedebert Tuglas in his booklet about Estonian literature (1936). This need not be a problem. It is inevitable to omit some names if one writes a short account of a literature. The question becomes interesting when we compare the fate of Marie Heiberg with the treatment of one of her fellow male writers. This person be Jaan Lõo who is, interesting enough, included in the last two histories above, the ones by Ristikivi (1954: 90–91) and Tuglas (1936: 95).

Let us, therefore, have a closer look on the pair Heiberg/Lõo. Jaan Lõo, a solicitor and lawyer, lived from 1872 to 1939. He was a contemporary of Marie Heiberg, though not exactly the same generation as he was born 18 years earlier. But he is often mentioned together with Heiberg as a poetic link between the generation of Young Estonia (*Noor Eesti*) and the early 1920s. The thing with Jaan Lõo is that he published – in 1916 – only one single volume of verse, something which is always stressed. He is the ‘one-volume-poet’ of Estonian literary history.

This fact wanders from one literary history to another and the reader is never given a chance to see why this is so. For it is almost impossible to get hold of Lõo’s poems. While we have several volumes of Heiberg and even a newish edition from 1988, nothing of Lõo’s work has ever been reissued. The only samples we have are a few poems in anthologies of poetry (e.g. ELA 1955: 351–354; Rummo 1967: 275–277; *Sõnarinne* 1: 481–486, mostly the same) which give an impression of the author. But nevertheless the author is called “no doubt canonized” by Toomas Haug in a recent article. (Haug 1999: 325) Haug’s classification of Lõo is, according to the footnote, obviously based on the fact that the academic literary history devotes three pages to him. (EKA III: 512–515) But Haug

withholds judgement on Lõo which is not only positive in this account; we can read here that the author's "achievements belong to the more mediocre ones" and that Tuglas did not like the "glorification of the ancient militarism". (EKA III: 515)

But anyway, let us deem Jaan Lõo "canonized" and compare him to Marie Heiberg and her canonization. In the above-mentioned comprehensive seven-volume academic literary history Marie Heiberg receives more than twice as much space (EKA III: 505–512), and that is what she obviously deserved: she wrote much more than Lõo, and she had an individual talent, while Lõo was rather conventional and conservative, certainly not innovative. On the basis of this thorough account in the most comprehensive treatment of Estonian literature Heiberg's position would be stronger than the position of Lõo. Also regarding the later editions of their poetry and the number of articles devoted to her, Heiberg would be in the leading position. But is this true for the whole picture? I compared the position of Heiberg and Lõo in twenty one monographs, handbooks and anthologies according to the size of the entry, the number of poems or the bare fact of mentioning and obtained the following picture:

	Marie Heiberg 1890–1942	Jaan Lõo 1872–1939	"winner"
Kampmann 1923	No	Yes	L
Tuglas 1936	No	Yes	L
Ristikivi 1954	No	Yes	L
ELA 1955	5 poems	5 poems	–
Mägi 1965	yes (2x)	Yes	H
Jänes 1965	9 lines	13 lines	L
Mägi 1965a, 1968	No	No	–
EKA III (1969)	7 pages, photo, autograph, frontispiece, examples	3 pages, photo, autograph, examples	H
Rummo 1967	6 poems	3 poems	H
Nirk 1970, 1983, 1987	Yes	no	H
EKBL 1975	56 lines, photo	31 lines	H
Sõnarine 1989	10 poems	6 poems	H

	Marie Heiberg 1890–1942	Jaan Lõo 1872–1939	“winner”
EKRL 1995	47 lines, photo	23 lines, photo	H
EKL 2000	41 lines, photo	20 lines, photo	H
Annus et al. 2001	19 lines, photo	39 lines, photo, example	L
Muru 2002	Yes	no	H
Riismaa et al. 2002, 2006	No	no	–
Noorhani 2003	Yes	no	H
Talve 2004	yes (3x)	mentioned (2x)	H
Hasselblatt 2006	yes (4x), 31 lines	no	H
Hetzer 2006	No	yes	L
Result	12	5	

Twelve times Heiberg was leading, six times Lõo, in two cases neither was mentioned at all, and in one case they were equally represented with five poems each. This means that Heiberg is indeed the somewhat more canonized author, but nevertheless her position seems not to be secure or guaranteed. The result also shows some examples of important handbooks where Heiberg is surpassed by her male colleague who wrote much less and is generally considered less important. The suspicion arises that this is due to his sex and that a female author of the same calibre would have been removed long ago.

The third method is *appending* women to a male part, i.e. describing them as part of something, not as something *an sich*. The most common method is to attach the woman to a man – as it has been the practice for many centuries. When we take a look at the biographical handbooks, we will see that this mechanism still works.

As we have a lot of partnerships within Estonian letters, I took a sample of 63 couples and asked how the fact that the two persons were married to each other has been mentioned (explicitly or not) in the respective entries of the three biographical handbooks mentioned earlier. I also included translators and other persons considered to be taken into the handbooks for whatever reason, but I might have

overlooked some persons when I have not been aware of the fact that they were married. On the other hand I included persons of whom I knew they have been married, although this might not have been mentioned in the respective handbooks. I did not, of course, take into account unregistered partnerships and all other kinds of 'living together' because there would be no border from where to begin to regard something as a partnership and because most of them simply never reach the literary handbooks.

The following chart displays the couples in alphabetical order and their representation in the handbooks. The first column gives the names of the couple arranged by alphabetical order on the basis of the person coming first in the alphabet. I stuck to the names used in the handbooks and did not take maiden names, pseudonyms or the like into account.

In the three central columns the data on both persons is analyzed or shortly quoted according to the three handbooks. This has been done in a standardized order to avoid confusion: starting with the male ('he') followed by the female ('she'). A hyphen (–) indicates that the person is not included in the handbook. 'Nihil' means that nothing is said about marriage with respect to the person in question.

In the last column a conclusion and possibly a comment are given. There are three possible judgements: 'traditional' means that the treatment follows the conservative pattern according to which the woman is attached to the man without any traces of a wife in the respective entry of the man; 'neutral' means that the treatment is gender neutral, the marriage has been mentioned in both entries or in none of them; 'inverted' means that it has been the other way round: With the man's entry we find information about his wife where no traces of a husband can be found with the woman's entry.

Partnerships in Estonian letters and their treatment in the handbooks

	EKBL	EKRL	EKL	comment
Adson, Artur & Under, Marie	he: nihil she: "married AA in 1924"	he: "was married to MU" she: "wife of AA"	he: "married MU" she: "wife of AA"	EKBL traditional, later neutral
Alver, Betti & Talvik, Heiti	he: nihil she: nihil, only "from 1937 E. Talvik"	he: "married to BA" she: "married to HT"	he: "married to BA" she: "married to HT"	neutral
Alver, Betti & Lepik, Mart	he: nihil she: nihil, only "from 1956 E. Lepik"	he: "married to BA" she: "married to ML"	he: "married to BA" she: "married to ML"	neutral
Beekman, Aimée & Beekman, Vladimir	he: nihil she: nihil	he: nihil she: "married to VB"	he: "married to AB" she: "married to VB"	traditional in EKRL
Berg, Maimu & Vahing, Vaino	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: "from 1969 to 1979 Vahing"	he: "was married to MB" she: "from 1969 to 1979 Vahing"	EKRL traditional, EKL neutral
Ederberg, Friedrich Wilhelm & Ederberg, Julie Wilhelmine	he: nihil she: "married WE in 1886"	he: nihil she: "married WE in 1886"	he: "married to JWE" she: "married WE in 1886"	traditional, only EKL neutral
Ehin, Andres & Seppel, Ly	he: nihil she: nihil	he: nihil she: "married to AE"	he: "married to LS" she: "married to AE"	EKRL traditional, earlier and later neutral
Hanko, August & Kurfeldt, Aita	he: – she: nihil	he: nihil she: nihil	he: "married AK in 1936" she: "From 1936 on married to AH"	neutral

	EKBL	EKRL	EKL	comment
Hasselblatt, Cornelius & Vogel, Marianne	–	he: nihil she: –	he: “together with his wife MV” she: “married to CH”	traditional
Haug, Toomas & Saluäär, Anu	–	he: nihil she: nihil	he: “married to AS from 1987 on” she: “married to TH”	neutral
Hiedel, Edvin & Hiedel, Lembe	–	he: nihil she: “married to EH 1953–1986”	he: “was married to LH” she: “married to EH 1953–1986”	EKRL traditional
Hint, Aadu & Nurme, Minni	he: nihil she: nihil, only “1941–1958 Hint”	he: nihil she: “was married to AH”	he: “was married to MN” she: “was married to AH”	EKRL traditional, change in EKL
Hint, Aadu & Vaarandi, Debora	he: nihil she: nihil, only [about the 1930s] “then D. Hint”	he: nihil she: nihil, only “from 1937 on Hint...”	he: “was married to DV” she: “was married to AH”	EKRL traditional, change in EKL
Härm, Viiu & Rummo, Paul-Eerik	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: “married to PER”	he: “married to VH” she: “married to PER”	EKRL traditional, change in EKL
Ilmet, Peep & Kaer, Krista	he: – she: –	he: nihil she: “married to PI”	he: “married to KK” she: “married to PI”	EKRL traditional, change in EKL
Jõerüüt, Jaak & Luik, Viivi	he: – she: nihil	he: nihil she: “married to JJ”	he: “married to VL” she: “married to JJ and [therefore] living in Helsingi and Rome”	traditional

	EKBL	EKRL	EKL	comment
Kabur, Boris & Reinla, Astrid	he: nihil she: –	he: “married to AR” she: nihil, only “from 1971 on Kabur”	he: “was married to AR” she: “was married to BK”	inverted, only EKL neutral
Kabur, Boris & Kõiv, Salme	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: nihil, only “1937–40 Kabur”	he: nihil she: “was 1937–40 married to BK”	traditional
Kallas, Aino & Kallas, Oskar	he: nihil she: “married from 1900 to OK”	he: nihil she: “married from 1900 to OK”	he: “was married to AK” she: “married in 1900 OK”	traditional, even still in EKL: With Aino the marriage is an act, with Oskar it is something mentioned casually.
Kallas, Alla & Kallas, Teet	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: “married to TK”	traditional
Kaplinski, Jaan & Toomet, Tiia	he: nihil she: –	he: “married to TT” she: “married to JK”	he: “married to TT” she: “married to JK”	neutral
Kross, Helga & Kross, Jaan	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: nihil	he: “was married to HK” she: “was married to JK”	neutral
Kross, Jaan & Viira, Helga	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: nihil	he: nihil she: nihil	neutral
Kross, Jaan & Niit, Ellen	he: nihil she: nihil	he: nihil she: “married to JK”	he: “married EN” she: “married to JK”	EKRL traditional, earlier and later neutral
Krusten, Reet & Tonts, Ülo	he: nihil she: nihil	he: nihil she: “married to ÜT”	he: nihil she: “married to ÜT”	traditional
Kudu, Reet & Remsu, Olev	–	he: nihil she: nihil	he: nihil she: “was married to OR”	traditional
Kuus, Elar & Tigane, Aino	he: nihil she: nihil	he: nihil she: “was married to EK”	he: married to AT she: “was married to EK”	EKRL traditional, earlier and later neutral

	EKBL	EKRL	EKL	comment
Ligi, Katre & Runnel, Hando	he: nihil she: –	he: “married to KL” she: “married to HR”	he: “married to KL” she: “married to HR”	neutral
Luik, Viivi & Paavle, Jaan	he: – she: nihil	he: nihil she: nihil	he: nihil she: nihil	neutral
Lumet, Huko & Talvest, Mai	he: nihil she: nihil	he: nihil she: “was married to HL”	he: “was married to MT” she: “was married to HL”	EKRL traditional, later neutral
Merilaas, Kersti & Sang, August	he: nihil she: nihil	he: “married to KM” she: “married in 1936 AS”	he: “married to KM” she: “married in 1936 AS”	neutral (but with her mentioned as an act, with him only as a fact!)
Morell, Madli & Undusk, Jaan	–	he: “married from 1987 on to MM” she: “married to JU”	he: “married to MU” she: “married to JU”	neutral
Nagelmaa, Abel & Nagelmaa, Silvia	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: nihil	he: “married to SN” she: “married to AN”	neutral
Neithal, Martin & Neithal, Reet	–	he: nihil she: nihil	he: “from 1977 on married to RN” she: “from 1977 on married to MN”	neutral
Niit, Ellen & Niit, Heldur	he: – she: nihil	he: nihil she: nihil	he: nihil she: nihil	neutral
Nurkse, Lea (Leonida Jurisson) & Raud, Mart	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: “married MR in 1925”	he: “was married to L” she: “married MR in 1925”	EKRL traditional, EKL neutral

	EKBL	EKRL	EKL	comment
Nõu, Enn & Nõu, Helga	–	he: “married to HN” she: “married to EN”	he: “married to HN” she: “married EN in 1958”	EKRL neutral, EKL less neutral: marriage as an act with the woman, casually noted with the man.
Olesk, Peeter & Olesk, Sirje	–	he: nihil she: “married to PO”	he: nihil she: “married to PO”	traditional
Parve, Ralf & Promet, Lilli	he: nihil she: nihil	he: “married to LP” she: “married to RP”	he: “married to LP” she: “married to RP”	neutral
Pedajas, Marje & Vallak, Peet	he: nihil she: –	he: “from 1927 on married to MP” she: “wife of PV”	he: “from 1927 on married to MP” she: “wife of PV”	almost neutral, but appended status with the woman
Pervik, Aino & Raud, Eno	he: nihil she: nihil	he: “married to AP” she: “married to ER”	he: “married to AP” she: “married to ER”	neutral
Puhvel, Jaan & Puhvel, Sirje Madli	–	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: “married to JP”	traditional
Rajandi, Hemmo & Rajandi, Lia	he: nihil she: –	he: “married to LR” she: “married to HR”	he: “married to LR” she: “married to HR”	neutral
Rammo, Adolf & Rammo, Helju	he: nihil she: nihil	he: “married to HR” she: “married to AR”	he: “married to HR” she: “married to AR”	neutral
Rannet, Egon & Rannet, Vaike	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil, only “wife Vaike Rannet” mentioned she: –	he: “married to VR” she: “1945–83 married to ER”	EKRL traditional (no entry for the woman at all), EKL more neutral
Raud, Mart & Raud, Valda	he: nihil she: nihil	he: nihil, only “wife Valda R” mentioned she: “married to MR”	he: “was married to VR” she: “married to MR”	EKRL traditional, EKL neutral

	EKBL	EKRL	EKL	comment
Reijonen, Tuuli & Uibopuu, Vae	er.: nihil she: –	he: “was married to TR” she: “was married to VU”	he: “was married to TR” she: “was married to VU”	neutral
Saar, Juhan & Saar, Olivia	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: “was married to JS”	he: nihil she: “was married to JS”	traditional
Saks, Ita & Smuul, Juhan	he: nihil she: –	he: “was married to IS” she: nihil	he: “was married to IS” she: nihil	inverted, no mention at the woman
Salokannel, Anja & Salokannel, Juhani	–	he: nihil she: nihil	he: “married to AS” she: “married to JS”	neutral
Saluri, Piret & Saluri, Rein	–	he: nihil she: nihil	he: nihil she: nihil	neutral
Samma, Olga & Samma, Otto	he: nihil she: –	he: “married to OS” she: “married to OS”	he: “married to OS” she: “married to OS”	neutral
Smuul, Juhan & Vaarandi, Debora	he: nihil she: nihil	he: “was married to DV” she: nihil	he: “was married to DV” she: “was married to JS”	EKRL inverted, change in EKL
Suits, Aino & Suits, Gustav	he: nihil she: –	he: “married in 1911 AS” she: “married to GS from 1911”	he: “married in 1911 AS” she: “married to GS from 1911”	neutral
Säärits, Aadu & Säärits, Ello	he: nihil she: nihil	he: “married to ES” she: “married to AS”	he: “married to ES” she: “married to AS”	neutral
Tamm, Aksel & Vellerand, Lilian	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: “married to AT”	he: nihil she: “married to AT”	Traditional

	EKBL	EKRL	EKL	comment
Toomus, Friido & Tõeveer, Terje	–	he: “was married to TT” she: “was married to FR 1933–40”	he: “was married to TT” she: “was married to FR 1933–40”	Neutral
Traat, Mats & Traat, Victoria	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: “married to MT”	Traditional
Unt, Lii & Unt, Mati	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: “married to MU”	Traditional
Vaarandi, Anton & Vaarandi, Debora	he: nihil she: nihil	he: nihil she: nihil	he: nihil she: “was married to AV”	Traditional
Viiding, Bernhard & Viiding, Ine	he: – she: nihil	he: – she: nihil	he: “was married with IV” she: nihil	Inverted
Viiding, Linda & Viiding, Paul	he: nihil she: –	he: “married to LV” she: “married to PV”	he: “married to LV” she: “married to PV”	Neutral
Väli, Heino & Väli, Silvi	he: nihil she: –	he: nihil she: “was married to HV”	he: nihil she: “was married to HV”	Traditional

There were only 27 cases, i.e. slightly more than two fifths (43 %), where we had no problem at all. The formulation was completely neutral in all editions, both persons were connected to their partner, or the marriage was not mentioned at all. With 32 couples, i.e. more than the half (51 %) we faced the classical problem that the woman was in one way or another attached to the man (although maybe not in all three editions). This could happen very directly – A is married to B, but in the article on B we don't find anything about A, and A is, then, the woman – or more indirectly: for instance, in the case of the man it is only mentioned among other things that he did something together with his wife, where in the entry of this very wife we find explicitly that she got married to a certain person. Generally, in the new edition of the bio-bibliographical handbook from 2000 (EKL), the editorial team obviously tried to neutralize all those cases, but there are still some problems left. An interesting result of the chart is, by the way, that the 1975 edition (EKBL) – the only 'socialist' one – is also really socialist in the sense that even the gender differences are minimized, as partnership remained very often unmentioned.

Only in four cases (6 %) the appending worked the other way round, i.e. that the man was the one to be explicitly married, not the woman.

Finally we have the mechanism of *diminishing* or *trivializing*. This means that you make women smaller and less important than they really are, you make them ridiculous so that they do not have to be taken too seriously. This is actually something that happens in everyday journalism and continues in the criticism from where it reaches the handbooks. The mere comparison, e.g., between the adjectives attached to male writers and those attached to female writers would probably yield interesting results. But a detailed analysis cannot be given here for reasons of space, suffice it to say that research of this kind has been conducted on other literatures (cf. e.g. Vogel 2001 for Dutch literature) – though not very exhaustively – and will obviously furnish the same results when applied to Estonian literature. Additionally, in Estonia this kind of research would be rather easy as the number of relevant journals is not too big.

To conclude I return to my initial questions: how gendered are Estonian literary histories and handbooks? Should the existing histo-

ries of literature be rewritten on the ground of feminist cultural criticism? Obviously ‘rewriting’ is too a strong word; many things are, in my opinion, well done. But nevertheless, there are enough shortcomings and doubtful decisions and suspicious tendencies; too many, in my opinion to ascribe them only to pure accident. They are significant. Therefore some parts of the literary field have to be reconsidered and a sober, gender-neutral view on Estonian letters would be more than welcome.

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