

*Throwing Mud in the Face or Gentle Journeys
into Frames of Time?
Some Notes on Post-Soviet Life-Writing
in Estonia*¹

Life-writing texts of various genres (e.g., autobiographies, memoirs, autobiographical novels, diaries, correspondences), frequently by well-known men and women of letters have been part of Estonian literary and cultural scene since its emergence in the second half of the 19th century. With a few exceptions, until recently, however, life-writing was considered to be of marginal (if any) importance in Estonian literary and cultural history. At the same time, life-writing has enjoyed an increasing popularity and visibility on the contemporary Estonian literary landscapes to the extent that a few years ago, a discussion of 'a life-writing boom' was initiated. Gradually, discussions of life-writing are becoming, albeit without a certain reluctance, an integral part of both academic and popular debates on Estonian literary culture.

In the current article, I wish to discuss some implications of this boom as it is reflected in critical reception to life writing that makes a visible effort to keep such genres or textual practices outside the realm of literature. In addition to taking a strongly critical stance toward life writing as such, a postulation of its development of as a 'boom' phenomenon also creates a distinctive temporal frame. Rather than looking at the development of Estonian Post-Soviet life writing as a continuity that emerges during the period of regaining independence and proceeds through the two decades undergoing gradual shifts and transformations, the use of the notion of the boom

¹ The article has been written with the support of ESF grants 7354 ("Positioning Life-Writing on Estonian Literary Landscapes" and TF project "Sources of Cultural History and Contexts of Literature).

suggests rapid unprecedented and uncontrollable growth that happens at the expense of marginalization of properly imaginative writing, i.e., fiction.

As an alternative to the 'boom' model, I would like to argue for the possibility to view Estonian Post-Soviet life writing as a continuous process that develops via various textual practices and modes of public engagement through the two decades – the 1990s and the 2000s – through interrelated and partially overlapping routes. The processes of the construction of subjectivity and identity in a number of autobiographical writings published in the first half of the 2000s by can be traced back to the emergence of Estonian “memorial culture” in the late 1980s and 1990s, characterized by a sudden and intense public visibility of memory. A central role in the development of such culture can be attributed to both oral and written testimonial accounts of personal experience focusing on the period of the Soviet occupation that played an important role in the process of dismantling the official Soviet discourses of history and contributed to the process of regaining independence.

Oral history research of totalitarian regimes has highlighted the central importance of tracing “the survival of the agentic” within the framework of state politics measuring its power through the degree of “the erosion of individual agency” (Crownshaw and Leyersdorff 2005: xiii). In the late 1980s and early 1990s life story became in Estonia a central vehicle of “the agency of the witness” (ib.), establishing “a memorial framework” as a central “mode of interpreting the past” (Hamilton 2005: 136). During this period numerous nation-wide public calls for submitting life stories were issued in Estonia; memoirs focusing on the experience of the Soviet regime were published in different journals, magazines and even serialized in daily newspapers.² One of the primary objectives of life narratives

² Among the many volumes of published life-stories, of highest importance is the monumental three-volume *Eesti rahva elulood. Sajandi sada elulugu kahes osas* (Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2000, 2003), the title of which in English is *Life-Stories of Estonians. One Hundred Life Stories of the Century in Two Volumes* and *Eesti rahva elulood III. Elu Eesti NSV-s* (Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2003), in translation *Life-Stories of Estonians. Life in the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic*. Other volumes focus, e.g., on the life stories of the

at that period was to testify to the totalitarian nature of the Soviet regime that established its domination in Estonia (as well as in the other Baltic States) via an intricate penal system including deportations, persecutions, uncontrolled violence, social stigmatization and various other measures aimed at the destruction of national communities and its material basis in Estonia. Apart from confronting official discourses of history and power, the reconciliatory capacities of life narrative and its role as a vehicle of remembrance have also played an important role in Estonia during the period.

The constantly growing corpus of life narratives but even more importantly, the ways in which it has shaped an understanding of both public and private modes of engagement with memory and history, allows to talk about a specific memory culture in Estonia as a “historical sensibility where temporal continuities are strengthened and sustained through communication with others” (Hamilton 2005: 137). Bringing together an extremely diverse body of narratives from various time periods and socio-cultural backgrounds, such memory culture can be viewed as a unique phenomenon enriching and diversifying the modes of the perception of culture, history, individuality and collectivity in Estonia.

A number of life writing texts by well-known Estonian literary figures published in the mid-2000s employ modes of collective and individual self-conception and -reflection similar to those prevalent in the textual corpus of life stories. No longer employed for the purposes of implementing socio-political change these works confirm and consolidate such modes of identification and self-representation within the framework of (literary) culture. Examples of such life writing texts include, for example *Kallid kaasteelised* (Dear Fellow Travelers, Volume I 2003, Volume II 2008) by Jaan Kross (1920–2007), one of Estonia’s most prominent contemporary novelists whose autobiography is structured as a web of interrelated

deportees, those of women, Russian-speaking minorities, and the period of the German occupation 1941–1944. Several volumes of life-stories have also been published in English: two of them focus on women’s life-stories (e.g., *She Who Remembers Survives* and *Carrying Linda’s Stones*), one on the life-stories of Estonians in general (*Estonian Life-Stories*).

stories featuring encounters of varied duration and degree of intensity with different people. *Isale* (To My Father, 2003) a life writing work by a well-known Estonian poet Jaan Kaplinski, is written in the format of an imaginary dialogue with the Polish father who perished in Soviet forced-labor camp and whom the author barely knew. Another work in this category, *Seltsimees laps ja suured inimesed* (Comrade Child and the Grown-ups, 2008) and its sequel *Samet ja saepuru* (Velvet and Sawdust, 2009) by an acclaimed children's writer and poet Leelo Tungal is a childhood story focusing on the period of Stalinism, narrated through the eyes of a child attempting to make sense of her mother's arrest and deportation when the author/narrator is only 4 years old.³

Next, I will take a brief look at the narrative structuring and thematic foci of *Kallid kaasteelised* by Jaan Kross, highlighting representations of subjectivity that reveal textual engagement with received modes of remembrance and processes of construction of identity in Post-Soviet Estonia but also go beyond them toward explorations of what Luisa Passerini has called the European identification (2007: 96–114).

Kallid kaasteelised (Dear Fellow Travelers) that has won Jaan Kross the title of “the nation's grandfather” and is considered an exemplary Estonian life-writing author, whose story is the story of all of us” is a prime example of the construction of a framework of memory that embodies and exemplifies the central importance of the “survival of the agentic” (Crownshaw and Leyersdorff xiii) under a totalitarian regime. In a two-volume work of nearly 1000 pages

³ The tradition of Post-Soviet Estonian life-writing is also marked by the Estonian publication of various life-writings of exile Estonians that can be, albeit from a different perspective, considered a part of that memory culture. These works have certainly also made a noteworthy contribution to the high visibility of life-writing on contemporary Estonian literary scene. However, as exile Estonian life-writing has a long tradition dating back to 1950s and would require a different conceptual frame, I will not address issue of exile life-writing in the current article. An overview of exile life-writing can be found in *Eesti kirjandus paguluses XX sajandil* (Tonts 255–292). I have discussed issues of exile, subjectivity, cultural identity and translation in an article focusing on the life-writings of Käbi Laretei (Kurvvet-Käosaar 2009).

Kross, starting with his childhood in the 1920s, proceeds with a detailed account of the turbulent times of the outbreak of the Second World War, the first Soviet occupation (1940–41), the German occupation (1941–1944) and his first arrest, the return of the Soviets in 1944 and his second arrest in 1946 and imprisonment and years of forced labor camp in Siberia following it, return to Estonia and attempts to find his place in the society despite his unfavorable political status, pervasive and often absurd limitations concerning educational and employment possibilities and everyday matters, building up his career as a writer and a few instances of opening up of the world behind the Iron Curtain for occasional possibilities to travel.

Kross makes visible the central concern of his work already with the title – *Dear Fellow Travelers* – that foregrounds the role of human encounters in the representation his life experience. Even more importantly, however, it points to a shared dimension of that experience that has been shaped by violent and overwhelming historical forces. This is further enhanced by the use of the adjective “dear” (*kallis*) in the title, commonly a rather private term of endearment in Estonian, used in public contexts only on rare occasions. Kross unravels his life experience not via a trajectory of his own individuality but presents it instead as a series of often anecdotal⁴ episodes from his life, interwoven with those of the lives of other people, even the most cursory of which firmly belong to the spatio-temporal frame that forms the over-arching structure of the work. Such textual strategy, in my opinion, ties Kross’ work implicitly to the life-story tradition and its central role in Estonian memorial culture; this aspect of *Kallid kaasteelised* that has been described as “an anthology that joins together the life(story) of Kross and his many fellow Travelers” (Kesküla A7) has also been underlined in the reception of the work.

⁴ In her interpretation of Kross’ *Treading Air*, Eneken Laanes views the anecdotalization of memory in the novel as a way of reprocessing memory that “renders painful experiences bearable” and “restores the subject to dignity and agency” (148–149).

The narrative structuring of *Kallid kaasteelised* that leaves the impression of an attempt to embrace as many episodes of different life stories as possible allows to argue that Kross may have put his outstanding position in Estonian culture to yet another use. Having the authority to be heard, he uses it not for foregrounding his own life experience or personality but for giving a presence to a multitude of lives and voices, in particular to those who can no longer speak for themselves. In her work on trauma and testimony, Leigh Gilmore has addressed the important issue of “the limit of representativeness, with its compulsory inflation of the self to stand for others, the peculiar way it operates both to expand and to constrict testimonial speech, the way it makes it hard to clarify without falsifying what is strictly and unambiguously “my” experience when “our” experience is also at stake” (Kross 2003: 5). Although it would be impossible to establish a definitive borderline between the “I” and “we” in Kross’ text, his narrative strategy reveals and underlines an awareness of the inevitable conflation of voices and selves in search of a collective, yet also markedly subjective mode of dealing with the past.

The memorial frame of *Kallid kaasteelised* is, however, not only limited to an elaboration of national destiny but places the events of the Second World War and its aftermath into larger contexts of the reconfiguration of whole Europe. Kross highlights the rupture that was caused the Second World War and the occupations and the severing off not only of Estonia but many other countries from Europe that were previously considered as part of it at and the ambivalence of identification that is pervading this issue even today. “As I saw it,” Kross comments on his silent response to a command by a German Army official at an office where he worked during the Nazi occupation, “the Republic of Estonia had been liquidated as the result of a particularly evil stunt by Stalin, Molotov and Ždanov and now fallen into the hands of an equally horrible maniac. As had half of Europe” (ib. 98). Such awareness is not unique to Estonian authors but is, for example, also echoed in various formats in the discussions about different conceptualization possibilities of Eastern and Central Europe. In a detailed overview of various cultural and geo-political definitions of the region, Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer refer to Czesław Miłosz’s definition of Central Europe as

“all the countries [including the Baltic states] that in August 1939 were the real or hypothetical object of a trade between the Soviet Union and Germany,” a definition that, as they point out, was, in turn, heatedly debated by other participants of the Budapest round-table in June 1989 where it was voiced (2004: 1).

The articulation of such position in *Dear Fellow Travelers* was underlined in the Estonian reception of the work that was viewed as describing the author’s life “as a member of a betrayed nation going through the excruciating ordeal of the experience of the Stalinist regime” (Haug 2006: B9), a sense of betrayal that is here evoked in particular with respect to the decisions taken by political powers of Europe and the USA at the end of the Second World War that resulted in a paradigmatic change in the configuration of Europe. Kross returns to this theme several times in his work, framing it in different experiential contexts.

An awareness of the shift and the prevalence of borders permeate Kross’ work, yet this is rarely manifested as a passive acceptance of the operation of political powers but rather as an attempt to make visible the continuity of the mental and cultural frame of Europe via multiple intersubjective processes. Kross makes a consistent and self-conscious effort to envision a wider space of existence, most importantly, that of a European space of human agency and interaction. As he wishes to underline with the inclusion of many often quite unusual events and encounters, despite the establishment of the Iron Wall as a political entity with very real material implications, the capacity for imagining the possibility of such interactions can contribute to finding ways of its redefinition and even erosion. A perception of European cultural identity that covers “geopolitical, ideological, and symbolic dimensions that are not completely coincident, but instead ... converge and diverge in confusing and sometimes paradoxical ways” (Spiridon 2006: 377) is certainly not new but lies perhaps at the very heart of the idea of European identity.

Shifting the emphasis from identity (as a fixed position) to that of identification (as a process), in her *Memory and Utopia* (2007), Luisa Passerini uses a range of interrelated conceptualizations of intersubjectivity on which she grounds her discussion of memory

focusing on questions of Europe. Building her argument on definitions of intersubjectivity ranging from a consideration of generational relationships between historians (Passerini 2007: 3) and intersubjective nature of “interpretational exchanges” in her work as an oral historian (ib. 4) to an awareness, supported by the work of Melanie Klein of the “relationship between persons rather than within the individual as a site for the negotiation of meanings” (ib.), Passerini proposes a “new investment in Europeanness [that] ... from exchange with others awaits recognition of that which is specific and that which is shared” (ib. 114).

Dear Fellow Travelers by Jaan Kross, “the nation’s grandfather” is, on the one hand considered by its critics to be an exemplary work of Estonian life-writing, “whose story is the story of all of us” (Kesküla 2003: A7) that offers a clear-cut conceptualisation of the Estonian identity vis-à-vis the Soviet occupation and Estonia’s exclusion, together with many other countries at the end of the Second World War, from Europe. On the other, the work also offers a more ambivalent and dynamic view of the life of the author and his many ‘fellow travelers’ where political and ideological borders cannot contain the many intersubjective processes that make up the core of the work. *Dear Fellow Travelers* proposes a (textual) configuration of Europeanness where the narrating subject is self-conscious both of its authoritative identity-forming position and the limits of that authority that inevitably erode that identity and metaphorically leave open a space of narration for the other.

Although the autobiography of Kross and several other works in the ‘memorial culture’ category have been received well by critics, in particular with regard to the ‘boom’, the advent of life-writing in Estonia has frequently been referred to in negative terms. Most commonly, it is viewed as impoverishment of ‘literature proper’ at the expense of the flourishing of non-fictional literature (e.g. Mutt 2009). Immediate reception of different works of life-writing makes visible the strategies that have been adopted in order to ensure that

the realm of “literature proper” would remain untainted by the invasion of life-writing.

Such stance can be illustrated by the reception history of two life-writing works published in 2008 – *Ajapildi sees* (Inside the Time Frame) by Mari Tarand and *Musta pori näkku* (Throwing Mud in the Face) by Mihkel Raud that, due to different reasons, received extensive public attention, one as an achievement that won high recognition by the institution of literature and the other as a work that questions the very borders of that institution, breaching the popular and the elite, the high and low culture, popular press and sophisticated aesthetic judgment.

Ajapildi sees, authored by a well-known radio journalist Mari Tarand, is a subtle and finely tuned reminiscence focusing on the author’s brother, an iconic Estonian poet Juhan Viiding that won two major Estonian literary awards in 2008.⁵ Even though it was not viewed as a work of literature per se, *Ajapildi sees* received praise for rich and subtle treatment of the 1950s and 60s and an empathetic and non-intrusive rendering of the life of the author’s brother (see, e.g., Kesküla 2008: 184, Kaus 2008: 42). Such reception seems to suggest that life-writing could tentatively be allowed to the very outskirts of the realm of literature proper if it stayed firmly within the boundaries of good taste, both in terms of the style of writing and the manner of representing life experience. In this particular case, it should not be overlooked that the subject of *Ajapildi sees*, the legendary Estonian poet himself already belonged firmly and unquestionably to the realm of literature, an affiliation that was in this case also extended to a poetic biography of him. By opening her work with a claim that apart from his brother, family members and friends, “this book also has [two] other protagonist[s] – literature and POETRY” (10), the author also underlines such affiliation herself.⁶

⁵ Prize for Literature of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia and the National Culture Award.

⁶ Parallel to such line of argument, the reception of the work also highlighted the relevance of auto/biographical knowledge about Juhan Viiding with regard to his legacy that Tarand’s work provides. Also, while characterizing *Ajapildi sees* as “a poetic narrative composed with reticence and dignity”, Jan Kaus nonetheless does not exclude the possibility that its

If *Ajapildi sees* established its' status from within the institution of literature, another work, an autobiography of an Estonian punk rock guitarist and popular TV-host Mihkel Raud titled *Musta pori näkku* gained attention due to its scandalous subject matter which, in turn, was reflected in sales numbers considerably exceeding those of the best-selling novels of the past few years. Self-conscious of the niche in the literary market that his book belongs to, the author offers the following rationale for his work: "For full-fledged existence, each proper nation needs /.../ at least five different brands of cheese at the local supermarket /.../ and myths and legends about alcohol addicted pop stars bouncing on the borderline of life and death, one day holding a football stadium size crowd spellbound the next getting busted by the militia." (Raud 2008: 5). Placing his autobiography squarely into a common and internationally popular sub-genre of life-writing – that of celebrity autobiography – the author here identifies himself as in a way a pioneer of this genre. Critical reception of *Musta pori näkku* has, however, not looked at it within the framework of that specific genre but rather in relation to more general issues of (discourses of) truth(-telling) and literary value.

Highlighting author's journalistic affiliations and characterizing the work in terms of satisfying the demand of the yellow press for the thirst for juicy personal details that undermines the artistic oeuvre, a well-known Estonian literary critic and novelist finds *Musta pori näkku* lacking in artistic quality due to its formal features (poor description skills, polluting influence of the English on the language of the work, etc.). Even more important than artistic shortcomings is for him the world-view advanced in *Musta pori näkku*; in his opinion, this work fulfils perfectly the new demand on the literary market for offensive and obnoxious stance in the guise of art (Kaus 2009b: 149). I have problematized the position of Jan Kaus by highlighting a possible pun in the title of Raud's autobiography.⁷

success can be explained by the fact that it is a biography of a person with celebrity status in Estonian culture, hence keen interest into the details of his life (Kaus 2008: 42).

⁷ The paper on the position of life-writing in contemporary Estonian literature delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Estonian literature in 2008, unpublished.

In Estonian there is an idiomatic expression 'to throw mud at someone', meaning 'to slander'. As the title itself already contains a hint to such treatment of the persons that appear on the pages of *Musta pori näkku*, in my opinion, it also automatically calls into doubt the seriousness of the offensive and disrespectful stance that the work supposedly flaunts. Furthermore, I have argued that the title can be read as a clue for reading the work in yet another way. In a sense the exaggerated flow of deliberately impolite language, including a multitude of four-letter words makes both the protagonist and other characters in *Musta pori näkku* as if constantly having 'mud in their face' which, rather than exposing in unpleasant and offensive manner, hides or camouflages their personalities and their habitat and functions like a code that only those belonging to the same subculture (in the given case, that of punk culture) can adequately interpret. Applying, from this point of view, the notion autobiographical truth as "an intersubjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of a life" (Smith and Watson 2001: 13), the reaction of Kaus becomes not merely understandable but to a certain extent even predictable.

Taking an entirely contrasting stand, yet another critic praises *Musta pori näkku* as an impressive literary achievement exactly because of its exaggerated and nontraditional style of rendering life experience. As he puts it, "the novel oozes such belletristic energy and artistic freedom that I had no hesitations whatsoever in placing it squarely into the category of fiction. This is a ritualistic text that turns documental material into fiction, a quasi-autobiography that calls into being a new reality" (Vaher 2008: 420). Although viewing the work as a remarkable contribution to novelistic production of the year 2008, such position itself seems to be quite firmly anchored in an understanding of life experience that can be unproblematically reproduced in life-writing with an employment of certain array of textual tools that guarantee the reading of the text as possessing (non-literary) truth-value.

The reception of these two works of life-writing makes visible apparently deeply grounded and relatively fixed assumptions about the relationship between life and art, truth and representation, fiction

and reality, experience and imagination in Estonian literary culture. Life-writing proper remains outside (or on the very margins) of the realm of literature while life-writing that stands out for its experimental style and imagery becomes suspect as a convincing non-fictional text. Thus, on the one hand, modestly imaginative, more matter-of-fact and non-hyperbolic language that seems to function as a proof of a truthful rendering of someone's life by the same token elevates those texts only in very limited cases into the category of 'literature proper'. On the other, life-writing works that have more imaginative narrative and tropic structure can be lifted from the category of non-fiction but by entering the realm of literature (i.e., that of fiction), they no longer can be read as offering a truthful and convincing representation of life experience.

Such conceptualizations of life-writing seem to a very little extent involve an understanding of any work of life-writing as a complex structure, a production of new textual reality that assumes an existence at the moment of writing and is influenced by a number of different factors, such as, e.g., the meaning-making and contextual quality and intertextual nature of memory, social and cultural production of experience and its interpretational nature, (Smith and Watson 2001: 16, 18, 24–26) and that “the stuff of autobiographical storytelling /.../ is drawn from multiple, disparate, and discontinuous experiences and the multiple identities constructed from and constituting those experiences” (ib. 35). One reason for the relative lack of sufficiently multifaceted considerations of different life-writing forms and practices can be perhaps attributed to its relative newness as an accountable phenomenon on the contemporary literary scene. As I argue in the current article, life writing necessarily does not need to be viewed as a completely new phenomenon, but as something that has not only been a part of Estonian post-Soviet cultural scene but a visible part of Estonian literary culture from its beginnings.⁸ There also seems to be the need, as I already have

⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the role and implications of life writing in Estonian cultural history, see the contributions of the special issue of life-writing of *Methis. Studia humaniora Estonica*. (5–6, 2010, ed. Leena Kurvet-Käosaar).

pointed out, to guard the borders of literature, a concern that is certainly heightened by an increasing output of life-writing works with an appeal for the mass market, such as, for example the many often co-authored celebrity autobiographies. One the other, as memory in general is a highly valued socio-cultural concept in Estonia, addressing memory's complex entanglement in issues of textual production may also, to a certain extent, be viewed as possible risk to its iconic status.⁹

Such position can to a certain extent be observed in the recent debate on Estonian literature of the 2000s in the literary journal *Looming*, where questions of memory and, to a certain extent, also those of life-writing are raised by almost all contributors. One aspect that emerges in these considerations is an emphasis on memory's monumental dimension in autobiographical representations, emblematic of the history and destiny of the nation as a whole. Including life-writings that focus on the period of independence from 1918 to 1939, the experience of WWII and the Stalinist regime and/or the Soviet period in general, works that are viewed as representing that dimension of memory and history are also considered to be noteworthy achievements of the literature of the 2000s. One example of such type of life-writing is Kross' *Kallid kaasteelised* (2003, 2008) that has been characterized as "a socio-cultural giant, reflecting, through the self, on the destiny of the whole nation" (Kesküla 2010: 117). Kross has also written a thorough theoretical consideration on life-writing, *Omaeluloolisus ja alltekst* (2003) that focuses on the interrelationship of his life experience and the process of writing historical novels. Providing an itinerary of the uses of autobiographical and historical elements in his work, Kross, who is first and foremost known as the author of historical fiction, emphasizes that as much as such thematic choices (time-wise limited

⁹ An excellent point against such speculation, however, is a recent monograph by Eneken Laanes, titled *Lepitamatud dialoogid: subjekt ja mälu nõukogudejärgses eesti romaanis* (Tallinn: Underi ja Tuglase kirjanduskeskus, 2009), in translation *Unresolvable Dialogues: subjectivity and memory in Post-Soviet Estonian novel* that offers an excellent discussion of memory's complex interrelationship with representation, history, subjectivity and collectivity.

to the 16th to the 19th century) were inspired by his genuine interest in history they were motivated by the Soviet censorship apparatus that extended beyond mere literary production to cover extensively everyone's representation possibilities of their lives, including, for example the CV or as it was then called, the questionnaire (Kross 2003: 10–11). The flourishing of different genres of life-writing in contemporary Estonia has been related to the impact of a longer period (20 years) devoid of censorship also by others (see, e.g., Velsker 2009: 1422) and the very small number of life-writings from the Soviet period also supports this view.

In addition, there is also an emphasis on the “new outspokenness” with regard to life-writing works dominated by patterns of inner development of the authors' subjectivity where also intimate details of the authors' lives, in particular those pertaining to the body (Hennoste 2009: 1277) play an important role (Kesküla 2010: 116–117, see also Velsker 2009: 1422, Olesk 2008: 441). Another aspect of life-writing that, although not novel as such on the Estonian literary landscapes, has again been viewed as surfacing as an important literary and/or life-writing genre is that of travel writing. As Tiit Hennoste formulates it: “Memoirs are something that can tentatively be titled “My X” where X would stand either for time or for a person” but now works where X is “an arbitrary place in the world” are quietly (re)entering the literary scene (2009: 1277). Although different manifestations of life-writing are included among literary achievements, the conclusions pertaining to the decade as a whole nevertheless often accentuate the lack of new aesthetic achievements (Kesküla 2010: 121).

Wider agreement on the advent of the so-called life-writing boom in Estonia has spurned heated debates where a reluctance of recognizing life-writing as part of a nation's literary heritage is currently gradually giving way to interrogations that have started envisioning new literary and cultural spaces that exhibit a more diverse and multifaceted understanding of life-writing with regard to representation, memory, truth, and aesthetic merit. The focus of the

current discussions of Estonian life-writing dominantly on issues of literary value isolates the 2000s from the previous decade where life-writing enjoyed massive popularity and public recognition in the format of the life-story. The exclusion of the life-story tradition from discussions of life-writing can be justified from the point of view of mapping the development of literature (proper). Yet, the inclusion of 1990s as one that witnessed the emergence of one specific popular forms or genre of life-writing in the tentative mapping of Post-Soviet Estonian life-writing contributes to making visible both the continuities and changes in the perception of memory and history and the dynamics of the representation of individual and collective subjectivities.

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