



## The Socialist New Woman Redux: Hella Wuolijoki's Life Writing in the 1940s

Katarina Leppänen

University of Gothenburg

### ABSTRACT IN ENGLISH

Autobiography can be thought of as, among other things, a speech of defence. The Estonian–Finnish author Hella Wuolijoki started writing her autobiography in prison and it very much reads as a legitimization of her political life choices. The article investigates how Wuolijoki depicts her own politicization, and how she plays with different author names in order to destabilize a taken-for-granted author position. The material used is her three part autobiography/memoirs, in which she explicitly declares that she is less interested in the facts of her life, but rather wants to keep them in their original memory-form. This gives her the freedom to recount events she deems important for her self-formation, rather than events of general interest. Feminist and autobiographical theory is used as a tool to investigate how dislodging the authorial position can open new ways of emphasising a woman's political development. Thus, the literary formation of a political and feminist persona can be studied through her works. In this article I relate Wuolijoki's writing to a way of theorizing the position of the political woman that could be found in Alexandra Kollontai's pamphlet on the socialist *New Woman* written in 1918. The article analyses how Wuolijoki legitimizes her political activities by recounting her life as always intricately connected to contemporary political events. The article shows that political autobiography is a concept that can open new perspectives on women's life writing and that the construction of an autobiographical persona that combines the concepts of woman and political may rely, as in this case, on types or models found in literature rather than life.

### ABSTRACT IN SWEDISH

Självbiografi kan ses som, bland annat, ett försvarstal. Den estnisk-finska författaren Hella Wuolijoki började skriva sin självbiografi i fängelset för att legitimera sina politiska livsval. Artikeln undersöker hur Wuolijoki skildrar sin egen politisering och hur hon leker med olika författarnamn för att destabilisera en förgivet tagen författarposition. Det analyserade materialet utgörs av hennes självbiografi/memoarer i tre band i vilka hon explicit deklarerar att hon är mindre intresserad av fakta och snarare vill behålla händelserna så som hon minns dem. Detta ger henne friheten att behandla skeenden som hon anser viktiga för sin egen formering snarare än sådant som kan vara av allmänintresse. Feministisk och självbiografisk teori används som ett verktyg för att undersöka hur förskjutningen av författarens ställning kan öppna nya sätt att betona en kvinnas politiska utveckling. I artikeln jämför jag Wuolijokis skrivande med Alexandra Kollontajs sätt att teoretisera den nya kvinnan (1918). Artikeln analyserar hur Wuolijoki legitimerar sina politiska aktiviteter genom att ständigt relatera till samtida politiska händelser. Artikeln visar att en läsning ur ett politiskt självbiografiskt perspektiv kan öppna för nya perspektiv för kvinnors life-writing och att konstruktionen av ett självbiografiskt persona som kombinerar begreppen kvinna och politik, åtminstone i det här fallet, är beroende av typer och modeller som finns i skönlitteraturen snarare än livet.

*Keywords:* Hella Wuolijoki; Finland; Estonia; political autobiography; the new woman; socialism

Who can write political autobiography? Is politics a subject vouchsafed those who have occupied centre stage in the political institutions? Or can politics be found just about everywhere, and can political autobiography thus be written from any position? In this article, I will read the autobiography of the versatile and equivocal Estonian–Finnish personality, Hella Wuolijoki, in terms of its politics. During the turbulent first half of the twentieth century, Finland experienced a number of major political processes. The liberation from the Russian Empire was finalized in 1917. It was the result of a long process of struggle for cultural and political independence and freedom, which had resulted in, for example, universal suffrage in 1906. The years after 1917 were marked by civil war between the “reds” and the “whites”, and political suspicion and distrust prevailed in the political institutions for decades to come. Finland fought two wars against the Soviet Union, the Winter War 1939–1940, and the Continuation War 1941–1944. It is during this global political turmoil that the events/texts analysed in this article unravel.

Hella Wuolijoki (1886–1954) was arrested for treason in May 1943 and sentenced to life imprisonment. The sentence was lifted in September

1944 when the peace treaty between Finland and the Soviet Union was signed. During these sixteen months Wuolijoki was held in solitary confinement, first by the security police, then at Katajanokka prison in Helsinki. The reason for this “life drama” was the confession by the Soviet spy Kerttu Nuorteva who, after a lengthy interrogation by the security police, revealed Wuolijoki as her secret contact in Finland, codenamed “The Poet”.<sup>1</sup>

Wuolijoki was born as Ella Murrik in Helme in 1886 (current southern Estonia, then part of the Russian Empire) and moved to Helsinki after secondary education in St Petersburg. During the first half of the twentieth century she acted politically on several different levels: as a playwright, journalist, salon hostess for diplomats and politicians, businesswoman, spy, and towards the end of her life as head of the Finnish national radio and a Member of the Finnish Parliament. During the period 1908–1923 she was married to the Social Democratic politician Sulo Wuolijoki. She aided diplomats and dissidents from both East and West; among the more famous was Bertolt Brecht, who found refuge at her mansion during the 1940s. She also acted as an intermediary in contacts between the Soviet ambassador in Stockholm, Alexandra Kollontai, and the Finnish government representatives, to enable peace negotiations during the Winter War and the Continuation War. She identified strongly with socialist ideology, wrote for the workers’ press and the workers’ theatre, agitated and lectured – Hella Wuolijoki undeniably lived a very political life. Her political adventures have preoccupied historians, and her literary writing and drama have been analysed by scholars of film and theatre.<sup>2</sup> She is still one of the most frequently played dramatists in Finnish theatres.

This story about Wuolijoki starts in prison when she is nearly 60 years old and begins writing her autobiography. Although Wuolijoki was something of a national celebrity in her lifetime and has attracted scholarly and popular attention, her autobiographies have not been studied. Yet, read as a combination of personal and political reflection, the autobiographies give a unique insight into the life of a politically active woman. Furthermore, her perspective as *not* being of Finnish descent places her outside the internal factions in Finland, a position she willingly exploited in order to gain social leverage, which I will return to.

The autobiography was published in three parts. The first two parts of her autobiography cover the years between 1901 and 1908, from childhood, high school years in Tartu and St Petersburg, to university studies in Finland. Written in prison, they can be expected to have an urgency when it comes to the topic of self-fashioning, but the same agenda is pronounced in the later writings too. Part three covers the years 1908–1918,

“only one world war and one revolution” and Wuolijoki’s way into business, politics, and radio (Haataja 35). Apart from the autobiographical works she produced eight plays during her imprisonment and a book on prison life. It is a reflection on freedom, captivity, and fellow inmates, not written in prison but apparently she memorized stories that could quickly be written and published once free (Tuomioja 297). Although, she had to abandon her usual *modus operandi*, which was to dictate her plays to a secretary.<sup>3</sup> The impressive productivity was made possible by a principle according to which prisoners were encouraged to continue their civil occupation while in prison; as an established author it was her job to write, and the books were swiftly published and republished in several editions in the coming years.

### AIM AND THEORETICAL FRAME

The purpose of this article is not to make a comprehensive analysis of Wuolijoki’s autobiographical writing, although no work of the kind exists to my knowledge. Instead, I want to focus on how her autobiographical texts, especially the three-part explicit autobiography, create the image of Hella Wuolijoki as a political woman.

I therefore identify Wuolijoki’s autobiographies as political autobiography, not in the sense of written by a politician, but rather as a recounting of a life as always connected to contemporary political events. I am suggesting this definition for two reasons. I want to widen the definition – political autobiographies are usually thought of as written to emphasize the protagonist’s activities as a politician, politics being the prime determinant for their story being of general interest (Knudsen et al.). A perhaps slightly contradictory wish is to narrow the use of the term political. In much recent research, almost all aspects of life can be identified as political, especially regarding women’s entry into the public sphere.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, I want to specify that my analysis of Wuolijoki will be conducted in relation to politics understood primarily as ideological standpoints (e.g. revolutions, independence movements) and institutionalized politics (e.g. parliamentary systems, established political parties), rather than general gender politics. Of primary interest is thus how politics, ideological and institutionalized, is used in autobiography in order to frame a life story.

In the article I approach Wuolijoki’s texts from two perspectives. Firstly, I analyse her use of different author identities and relate them briefly to ideas about gender and authorial authority. Secondly, I investigate how Wuolijoki models herself as a political woman into the socialist new woman in Alexandra Kollontai’s version of the popular literary

figure. When one does not want to enrol in the traditional female roles, what alternatives are there? Can name-plays and literary paragons be of use?

### THE TELEOLOGY OF SELF-REPRESENTATION

How did Wuolijoki write her life? What did she remember, considering that she did not have access to any materials, such as diaries or letters, to support her? Doubtlessly, this restriction affects the content and form of the texts, which Wuolijoki acknowledges: "I just wrote what was in my memory" (Wuolijoki 1945a, 5) and "I have wanted to preserve these, as well as my other memoirs, in their original form, as humane documents of what a person may remember of her youth within prison walls" (Wuolijoki 1947, 8).

Although Wuolijoki begins, so to speak, from the beginning, with family history, she writes a most political autobiography right from page one. This established the story that explained why she ended up where she was, in prison. Each episode that is given attention, even quite mundane events, is placed in a context of wider political significance. This feeling of immediacy of past and present is enhanced by the introduction which starts in the writing moment: "My memoirs are a monologue with myself in the prison's solitary confinement awaiting court martial judgement [...] I fled to the beauty and freedom where they could not catch me" (Wuolijoki 1945a, 5). Thereafter, the families on the maternal and paternal side are mapped. They are placed in the peasant resistance to the Baltic German landed gentry. The school years in Tartu, far from family, are characterized by a struggle "against the Russian teachers and German mentality" and the right to education in Estonian (ibid. 24). Parents, siblings and relatives figure to the extent they relate to political interests, partly through her father's connections to the Estonian nationalist cultural elite, her mother's fear of what people will say about her unruly daughter, and the sisters' wild summers that lead to Hella never really being civilized into the role expected of decent girls, although many classmates' mothers tried (ibid. 34–35, 103). She coped by using "cunning and false submissiveness" to avoid the part of well-behaved middle-class girl (ibid. 52). She won the respect of the nationalist movement that had its main centre in Tartu with leading figures Jaan Tõnisson, editor of the nationalist journal *Postimees*, and her contemporary Gustav Suits, who later initiated another nationalist movement, Noor Eesti [Young Estonia] (Raun 2009).

Wuolijoki places her political awakening in relation to a couple of events of very different character. Initially, it is all about nationalism, a

struggle she grows up with and participated in during her school years, which also places her in the organized nationalist groups in Tartu. A radicalization towards “feminism, socialism, and other social issues” occurred when Lui Olesk and Minni Kursin, the latter had studied in London where she had become “familiar with Fabians and Russian revolutionaries”, lived in an open relationship that horrified even the nationalist factions (ibid. 132). The determinacy of the couple impressed the young Wuolijoki, who admired their ideological conviction to stand against conventions: “I had decided to fight for my beliefs” (ibid. 133–4). Major political upheavals affected her and awakened her political interest. During the troubles in the Russian area during 1905, the Russo–Japanese War and the general strike in Finland in autumn 1905, bread riots in St Petersburg and in Moscow, there was a further radicalization. Wuolijoki came home for Christmas from university and found herself in her parents’ home in Valga, which was the centre of Russian revenge raids against the Estonian peasant uprising. The revenge hit the people hard, not only those who participated in the burning of mansions, but also the intellectual and educated in general: elementary school teachers, doctors and local politicians. Wuolijoki describes how “the barons rode first [Baltic Germans] and the estate managers on their fine horses, followed by Russian officers” (Wuolijoki 1945b, 133). They rode from farm to farm to flog, imprison, or execute members of the resistance. Hella’s sister Salme was in Moscow during the unrest and both sisters became socialists through these events. Thus, these are stories about a young woman’s political awakening that show a shift from national romantic worldview into a socialist, “Life was like a surge and opened my eyes to the progress of humanity, and Estonia could not stand outside” (Wuolijoki 1945a, 81).

### THE “AUTOBIOGRAPHER”

The autobiographies were published under the name Hella Wuolijoki, with titles that refer to stages in the author’s life: *A Schoolgirl in Tartu*, *University Years in Helsinki* and *I Became a Businesswoman*. The books all have the, at first sight, somewhat strange subtitle *Juhani Tervapää’s Monologues in the Drama of Time*. Juhani Tervapää was the male pseudonym Wuolijoki had used when she wrote for the workers’ theatre in 1936, in the hope that they would not suffer from the censorship that her early work was subjected to both in Finland and Estonia. At the National Theatre, it was quite impossible to stage anything written by Hella Wuolijoki, although other theatres were less restrictive. She also took part in literary competitions under the clever *nom de plume* Felix Tuli [Felix Fire] (Tuomioja

186–188; Koski 93–94). As early as 1918 her name as translator was erased from a German opera adaptation of Alexis Kivi's *Seven Brothers*.<sup>5</sup>

Her plays in the Niskavuori series were tremendously popular, with nearly 180 different productions between 1936 and 2002 (Koivunen). At the centre of the story is the farm of Niskavuori, its fortunes mirrored through different generations, with the self-evident ingredients of power, love, class differences, strong women, and the clash between the old and the new society. When the Niskavuori plays were adapted for the silver screen (1938–1958, 1984) some were published under the name Juhani Tervapää.<sup>6</sup> The early films were also hit by censorship, not for their political content, but for being immoral. Regarding censorship Kimmo Laine writes that “in the right-wing public sphere it was somewhat easier to tolerate Tervapää as a proponent of the new morality than [Wuolijoki] as a socialist” (quoted in *ibid.* 291). The censors did the films a favour, he explains, by shifting focus from the political to the moral.

Concretely then, the choice of a name was important both for where (and how much) she was played, and how her plays were interpreted. So, what does the double name signal in the autobiographical context? Is it a purely commercial move to capture as many readers as possible, fans of her wildly popular plays and movies (Tervapää), and those on the political left (Hella Wuolijoki)? Is it a game with her roles in Finnish society as both acclaimed author and politically uncomfortable? Given the previous name change, not only of the last name in marriage, but also the first name of Ella (a name that works as well in Finnish) to Hella, she is obviously playing with the relationship between author/identity/signature. The picture is further complicated by the inconsistent use of names; the back matter vacillates between “Juhani Tervapää’s monologues continue” to “Hella Wuolijoki: A schoolgirl in Tartu”. Is this not along the same lines that Paul de Man has argued, that the *apparent* conformity which exists between the author and the main protagonist of the autobiography in fact reveals that all such compliance is fictional (even impossible)? This means that the assumption that life precedes the autobiography can be replaced by the opposite view – that the autobiographical project “produces and determines the life” (quoted in Lenemark 94).

Others, for example, Liz Stanley, have cautioned against interpretations that are too postmodernist, arguing that the bio [life] precedes the graph [writing] (Stanley *passim*). Stanley’s insistence is of course correct, there has to be a life to write about. Yet, the auto can no doubt be seen as an empty signifier in relation to the bio and the graphing because there is no necessary correlation between the I-that-lives, the I-that-writes, and the I-that-is-being-written. A constructivist approach to the autobiographical genre need not, of course, be a negative or undesirable effect of the

struggle between fact/fiction, bio/graph, or author/protagonist. The dislocation and reinterpretation of the self can be *the* reason to write autobiography. It is along these lines I read Wuolijoki.

Instead of the death of the author, the dual authorships on the title page suggest a duplication of the authors, which of course is a way to kill off the idea of the authentic author of the work (Foucault 1977). Moreover, Wuolijoki's move questions ideas about gender: is it a she or a he that stands behind the work? Furthermore, this ambivalence is linked to different gendered expectations about the author: is he or she telling the life? When combined, these shifts and indeterminacies of positions emphasized the cultural and social co-creation of identity.

In the autobiographical texts Wuolijoki is playing with cross-references between different personal pronouns. She writes about her first years in Finland:

---

Was this really I? There is nothing left of that girl, except that I remember her, remember what happened to her and how she felt in the surroundings. She was like a piece of wax where the world could print its stamps and marks. The stamps were printed over each other and disappeared. The deepest marks were left, formed sores, scared – and do not hurt [me] (Wuolijoki 1945b, 6).

---

The text alternates between a self-reflexive I who recalls, but the I does not remember her past self (or me), but a her.

The ability to write autobiography in an “un-womanly” manner that emphasized the political was perhaps offered by Tervapää's co-authorship, where “Hella Wuolijoki: A Schoolgirl in Tartu” meets “Juhani Tervapää's Monologues in the Drama of Time”. Wuolijoki authors herself as a girl, but the one giving a monologue is Tervapää! The dual signature violates the agreement within the genre of autobiography, which Philippe Lejeune described as a pact in which the author, narrator and protagonist is expected to be identical (Lejeune 21). Lisbeth Larsson has also argued convincingly, based on her Swedish source material, that a simplistic gender division between different kinds of autobiography is hastened – differences prevail but are the result of several different mechanisms of social expectations, power, authority and editorial practices (Larsson 126). Rather, a distance is created between Wuolijoki and Tervapää, between the author and the reader, and between the author and the context. One can imagine, at least, a situation where the reader simply does not know who is telling the story, thereby undermining the agreement between author-self, the protagonist and the reader on the question of *how the text should be read*. The fluidity between fact and fiction is, a central part of Hella Wuolijoki's public image. The historian



Lauri Haajala writes: "In the plays one could even see more of Hella's actual thinking than in the memoirs that were born under special circumstances and with an obvious political purpose" (22). The leakage between fact and fiction is evident when she writes, "I can't help that I see everything that happens to me as small and large plays" (Wuolijoki 1947, 172). Play is here obviously not related to fiction, but rather to a dramatization of events. Does she conquer another authorial position that allows a different story to be told than the one expected? Does the Tervapää signature signal that she has already *passed* as male, in the sense of public acceptance, and can Wuolijoki use this to avoid having to write from a female position?

### THE LIMITS OF SELF-REPRESENTATION – THE POLITICAL WOMAN

In her autobiography, Wuolijoki is distancing herself from what society considered feminine. While Wuolijoki's friend and contemporary, the literary author Aino Kallas, broadly reflects on the conflict both between femininity and creativity, and between the personal creativity and family, such features are almost entirely lacking in Wuolijoki (Rojola et al. 2011). Wuolijoki was, of course, as aware as Kallas was, about the debate taking place in Europe during the early 1900s on women's lack of creativity and original ideas. These ideas, propagated by men and women alike, emphasized instead women's roles in family and society as nurturers and educators. The idea of complementary genders, the female offering an alternative to the male, in society, politics etc., was of course a commonplace for the bourgeois women's movement (see e.g. Offen). Not once does Wuolijoki juxtapose her achievements in business, politics, or literature to womanhood or motherhood in a self-accusatory manner. Admittedly, it can be hard to combine family, research, and political work, but the solution is never presented as a choice where one activity should be abandoned.

The framework within which Wuolijoki writes his life is near Alexandra Kollontai's vision of the socialist New Woman (see also Ledger 1997). Kollontai's new woman should not primarily be understood as an abstraction of women's role in Soviet society; quite the contrary, her argument is grounded in a conflict between bourgeois women and socialist women. Kollontai's articles and published speeches cover a number of genres, but I choose to read her primarily as a feminist theorist.<sup>7</sup> The essay "The New Woman" was written in 1913, before the Russian Revolution, and is part of a larger context of the socialist moral reorientation where mainly women's role in society was expected to change so as to make the politicization

of women possible. It should be noted that Kollontai, despite her position as Commissioner for Social Affairs in the first Bolshevik government, had great difficulties selling her ideas of refiguring the gendered order to the leadership and Vladimir Lenin (see e.g. Farnsworth 1980). According to socialist doctrine, the problem of women's inequality would resolve itself at the abolition of private property – as it was an expression of ownership. Organizations pertaining to women's interests specifically were considered to split the interest of the working class and had to be avoided. Kollontai, however, wrote and spoke energetically on women's issues, sexuality, and family policy in pamphlets, novels, and lectures.

The socialist new woman is a character who appears in many guises. Kollontai is trying to catch her manifold features: "It goes without saying that the type of the 'new woman' varies from country to country, that membership in this or that social stratum gives it its particular stamp, that the psychological expression of the heroine, her strivings, her life-goals, can exhibit a significant divergence from each other" (Kollontai 2). The new woman is not a template or stereotype with given mandatory characteristics that each individual woman who aspires to such a subject position must fulfil. Instead, new women emerge in various guises in different places. One important point here is that the new women in Kollontai's vision has representatives in all social strata, all occupations, all countries, all ethnicities/nationalities. Kollontai allows for the proletariat, workers, clerks, doctors, and artists to embrace the new. She thus did not follow the socialist literary convention with clearly defined roles for both male and female characters that authors were expected to emulate and reproduce. Rather, the new woman's main characteristic was her adaptability to a new ideology of love, family, and emotions where romantic love did not entail women's subordination.

Kollontai's essay deals with female characters in fiction, not reality. Yet, there is a link between these, she says, because "Life creates the new woman – literature reflects them" (*ibid.*). In this way, the text is descriptive at two levels (literature and reality), but it is also didactic as it provides guidance on how the new woman can tackle new challenges of creativity and political engagement.

#### A NEW WOMAN WRITES HERSELF

Wuolijoki was of course familiar with the new woman as a literary figure, and several characters in her drama can be related to the ideals of the new woman. Lacking concrete evidence, it is impossible to argue that Wuolijoki consciously modelled her autobiographical work according to

Kollontai's types. However, there are many features in Wuolijoki's autobiographies that support such a reading, one being the aforementioned play with names through male and female authorship, the protagonist's rejection of traditional female activities, the emphasis on depicting the political life at the expense of the private. The image Wuolijoki presented could easily be legitimized by Kollontai's new ideals.

What is included in the autobiography of a modern political woman? That she grew up in an environment steeped in politics is evident from the early-years descriptions given in the diaries and summarized above in this article. The politically formative years in early adulthood are characterized by the move to Helsinki and concrete political actions and agitation against tsarist Russia and for the workers' movement. Living in Helsinki in the early twentieth century entailed a number of daily encounters with politics, for which the newly arrived Wuolijoki had an astute eye. She puts the protagonist in an outside position by describing herself as one who cannot follow social decorum. On the one hand, she is a foreigner and therefore unable to act properly in relation to different internal conflicts in the Helsinki circles. This has a positive side as she manages to keep good relations to the different factions of the Finnish independence movements, which were divided by class and language, and moves unhindered between organizations, families, and loyalties. In the autobiographies the process takes the form of a learning process as events and conflicts unfold in her everyday life. On the other hand, the rebelliousness of her personality, the passion for political change, forces her to break gendered conventions. She asks uncomfortable questions, causes disturbance by entering male arenas (especially as a journalist). The image created is one of a brave independent woman – Wuolijoki borrows the Swedish feminist lesbian critic, poet, and chronicler Klara Johanson's motto, "Give me today my daily courage to put my foot in it."<sup>8</sup> Wuolijoki turns the social insecurity of the protagonist into an indisputable asset.

After the initiation into Finnish society, Wuolijoki becomes involved in political activities. Her knowledge of Russian was important and she was engaged as an official translator in several important meetings between the Russian revolutionaries and the Finnish workers' movement (Wuolijoki 1945b, 123). Agitation among Russian soldiers posted in Helsinki was an important channel for propaganda, and Wuolijoki describes how she borrowed an apartment as a temporary hideout for dissident soldiers. Her political activities are formalized as years go by. Journalism was an important part of Wuolijoki's professional life and was important for the economy of the family. She wrote critique for *Työmies* [The Working Man] and Estonian papers, among other things, as one of only two female reporters at the first gathering at the Duma in Moscow in 1906 (ibid. 187). There

are also a few short notes on her work as an agitator and lecturer traveling around the country, spreading the ideas of historical materialism. These lectures, she describes, were often held in small overcrowded quarters and the people she met taught her more about socialism “than she managed to teach them” (Wuolijoki 1953, 71–77).

Wuolijoki, then, writes itself as the new socialist woman, one for whom class always comes first:

---

I have always admired women who take their destiny into their own hands and created a life of their own. I've never been one of those so-called women's liberationists [*naisasianainen*], and I have never believed and still do not believe that they [*naisasianaiset*] can bring equality for woman, on a par with the men. The workers will do it. [...] How little recognition the bourgeois women's movement leaders have given the labour movement! (ibid. 183–184)

---

The socialist political woman's opponent is the bourgeois woman in the first place, men in the second place; the order was established and unshaken. Wuolijoki's ways to enrol in the political and social order are multilayered. On the one hand, her socialist and left-wing ideological conviction notwithstanding, Wuolijoki worked within the international business community and during the First World War she traded in wheat, coffee, and sugar, in the context of several large companies and as an independent agent. Given the war and the prevailing trade embargo, it was a delicate task. For some years she owned and ran a company in the sawmill industry. Skillfully she used her contacts in the USSR to gain access to the vast forests of Karelia. This she describes as a pragmatic attitude – she needed to support herself and her family. The money was also used in part to support the socialist cause, as she could, for example, accommodate Brecht and his entourage. She describes her relationship to men as mostly unproblematic regarding what we today would call gendered hierarchies, although she notes that “I then became a businesswoman, or one that they call a businesswoman, because there are businessmen” (ibid. 195). Business, it seems, was more of an intellectual than a political, challenge:

---

I saw dancing around money as a thrilling spectacle and spoke my own story lines now and again with pleasure, when they ended up right, and the result was just the things that I wanted (ibid. 198)

---

Just a few pages later, she notes, however, that she needed to be careful during her travels to tsarist Russia. In these cases it is not workers, but the Russian officers representing the old social order who were fixed

in traditional gender roles. With the sawmill foremen and with Western businessmen, however, it was no problem.<sup>9</sup>

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The autobiographies of Hella Wuolijoki allow for the protagonist to emerge as a political and public figure, while the private perils of Hella Wuolijoki play a subordinate role. She does not confirm the picture of herself as a private person and woman in the first place, nor is her husband the protagonist of her autobiography, which according to genre conventions was often the case. Instead, it is she, as a thoroughly political figure, who takes the centre stage.

Simultaneously, as I have shown, Wuolijoki the author destabilizes her own story by using different names, and by emphasizing that she is not interested in revising her facts, but wants to keep them as “humane documents”. A further possibility to disrupt the life story is to let the protagonist clash with contemporary gender norms, which is constantly highlighted by Wuolijoki herself. She does not in any way deny her femininity, her marriage or the child; it’s just that the story is about Hella Wuolijoki, the political person. The new woman literature in general and the socialist new woman offered a figure for such reimagining. It is not the new woman’s general freedom in love or work that is emphasized in the socialist version; rather, it is woman’s responsibility as a political being.

### WORKS CITED

- Ammond, Jukka. *Niskavuoren talosta Juurakon torppaan: Hella Wuolijoen maaseutunäytelmien aatetausta*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 1980. Print.
- Ammond, Jukka. *Hella Wuolijoki kulttuurivaikuttaja: Vuosisata Hella Wuolijoen syntymästä*. Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 1988. Print.
- Farnsworth, Beatrice. *Aleksandra Kollontai: Socialism, Feminism, and the Bolshevik Revolution*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980.
- Foucault, Michel. “What is an author?” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Haataja, Lauri. “Hella Wuolijoki kahden maailman rajalla.” Ed. Jukka Ammond. *Hella Wuolijoki kulttuurivaikuttajana*. Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 1988. Print.
- Knudsen, Ann-Christina L., and Karen Gram-Skjoldager. *Living Political Biography: Narrating 20th Century European Lives*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2012. Print.
- Koivunen, Anu. *Performative Histories, Foundational Fictions: Gender and Sexuality in Niskavuori Films*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2003. Print.
- Koski, Pirkko. *Kaikessa mukana: Hella Wuolijoki ja hänen näytelmänsä*. Helsinki: Otava, 2000.
- Kruus, Oskar. *Hella Wuolijoki*. Tallinn: Virgela, 1999. Print.

- Larsson, Lisbeth. *Sanning och konsekvens: Marika Stiernstedt, Ludvig Nordström och de biografiska berättelserna*. Stockholm: Norstedt, 2001. Print.
- Ledger, Sally. *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997. Print.
- Lejeune, Philippe. *On Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989 [1975].
- Lenemark, Christian. *Sanna lögner: Carina Rydberg, Stig Larsson och författarens medialisering*. Hedemora, Möklinta: Gidlund, 2009. Print.
- Lokaneeta, Jinee. "Alexandra Kollontai and Marxist Feminism." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28 April 2001.
- Offen, Karen M. *European Feminisms 1700–1950: A Political History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. Print.
- Raun, Toivo. "The Estonian Engagement with Modernity: The Role of Young Estonia in the Diversification of Political and Social Thought." *Ajalookultuuri Ajakiri*. Tartu-Tallinn National Archives, 2009.
- Rojola, Lea, and Leena Kurvet-Käosaar. *Aino Kallas: Negotiations with Modernity*. Helsinki: SKS, 2011.
- Smith, Sidone, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. Print.
- Stanley, Liz. *The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992. Print.
- Tuomioja, Erkki. *Häivähdys punaista: Hella Wuolijoki ja hänen sisarensa Salme Pekkala vallankumouksen palveluksessa*. Helsinki: Tammi, 2006. Print.
- Wuolijoki, Hella. *Koulutyttöinä Tartossa vuosina 1901–1904: Juhani Tervapään yksinpuheluja aikojen draamassa*. Helsinki: Tammi, 1945a. Print.
- Wuolijoki, Hella. *Yliopistovuodet Helsingissä 1904–1908. Juhani Tervapään yksinpuheluja aikojen draamassa*. Helsinki: Tammi, 1945b. Print.
- Wuolijoki, Hella. *Kummituksia ja kajavia: Muistelmia Eino Leinosta ja Gustaf Mattssonista*. Helsinki: Tammi, 1947. Print.
- Wuolijoki, Hella. *Minusta tuli liikenainen: Eli valkoinen varis 1908–1918. Juhani Tervapään yksinpuheluja aikojen draamassa*. Helsinki: Tammi, 1953. Print.

### Electronic sources

- Kollontai, Alexandra. "The New Woman", <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollontai/1918/new-morality.htm>. Web. 3 March 2015.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katarina Leppänen is Associate Professor in Intellectual History at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden where she teaches intellectual history, European studies, gender studies, and co-ordinates a Master's program in critical studies. Her doctoral thesis was on the Swedish feminist Elin Wägner, focusing on theories of alternative social orders and ecology (2005). The ongoing research project *Cosmopolitan and vernacular dynamics in world literatures* deals with transnational, international and regional exchanges in the Nordic and Baltic area in early twentieth century.

## NOTES

- 1 The biographical sketch is based on the double biography of Hella Wuolijoki and her sister Salme Pekkala by Erkki Tuomioja. No full picture of Wuolijoki's secret engagements is available as not all Soviet archives are open (access is, in fact, becoming more and more difficult again). Nuorteva was deported to the Soviet Union where she was sentenced to a ten-year imprisonment for treason; their intermediary, Martta Koskinen, was executed for a related crime, see Tuomioja 296.
- 2 There are two identifiable "waves" in research regarding Wuolijoki, one in the early 1980s and a resurgence in early 2000s. See e.g. Ammond (1980); Ammond (1988); Kruus (1999); Koski, Pirkko (2000); Tuomioja (2006); Koivunen (2003).
- 3 The influence of the secretaries has been discussed in Koski (2000). This is of course yet another destabilizing factor pertaining to authenticity and authorship.
- 4 I am her thinking of the term politics used in combinations like the "politics of voice", "politics of space", "politics of remembering", which offer interesting perspectives on autobiographical texts, yet fall outside this study. See e.g. Smith and Watson.
- 5 Wuolijoki (1947, 78). The publisher apparently printed one complimentary copy with her name. Her cooperation with Brecht has also been made largely invisible, see e.g. Koski 186–93.
- 6 When the film *Loviisa* in the Niskavuori series was launched in 1946, Wuolijoki's name did not appear on the movie poster; it was "Juhani Tervapää's successful play on the silver screen", see reprint in Koivunen 265.
- 7 How Kollontai has been read and interpreted over the years has changed radically with an eye on changes in both socialist and feminist theories. An interesting theoretical re-reading is offered in Lokaneeta.
- 8 "Ge mig i dag mitt dagliga mod att blamera mig." Johanson is quoted in Swedish with the Finnish translation "Anna minulle tänä päivänä minun jokapäiväinen rohkeuteni nolata itseni", Wuolijoki (1953, 5).
- 9 She does tell of one occasion of harassment, Wuolijoki (1945b, 197).