

Gender and Emotion in Comparative Perspective

Raili Marling
University of Tartu

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Abstract: In her article "Gender and Emotion in Comparative Perspective" Raili Marling argues that although the study of affect is anything but new, literary studies can benefit from the creative tension between affect and (feminist) politics. Building on the work of Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant, Marling engages with the debates within affect theory and then fleshes out the idea of literature as a gendered intimate public sphere and investigates the political effects of emotions as cultural practices. The resulting — largely Anglophone — theoretical apparatus is then tested in a cross-cultural context by discussing Elo Viiding's negotiation of "happiness duty" and the attendant (political) tensions including those related to gender.

Raili MARLING

Gender and Emotion in Comparative Perspective

Although in 1984 Fredric Jameson mourned the waning of affect in late capitalism, since the late 1990s affect has become an almost ubiquitous presence in the humanities. The affective turn is sometimes seen as a part of the wider ontological turn and there is a parallel in the renewed interest in phenomenology, the study of the everyday, and new materialism. The boom of scholarship on trauma and cultural memory can be seen as part of the same trend. Affect has been important in feminist thought and politics articulated as it is in the slogan "the personal is political." Yet the current popularization of affect suggests more than the fashionable rediscovery of a term; rather, we see a "desire to contest a certain account of how ... political arguments and rationality have been thought to operate" (Leys 436). The contemporary affective turn is often dated to 1995 when Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's and Adam Frank's essay "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold" and Brian Massumi's "The Autonomy of Affect" were published. Since then, the bibliography has grown dramatically.

Marguerite La Caze and Henry Martyn Lloyd, however, caution us that this hailing of the affective turn as an "epistemological shift" in the humanities and social sciences might be "hyperbolic" (2). It remains, above all, a preoccupation of critical theory and cultural studies. The turn to affect necessarily means a turn away from something else, above all the linguistic turn. On the one hand, it appears to be a turn from the mind to the body, reversing the value given to this central binary of Western thought. On the other, it can be seen as a turn away from poststructuralism's declaration of the death of the subject as "a dead subject emits no more cries of pain" (Terada 2).

As is to be expected in the case of an approach that defines itself as novel, the rejection of the past may be over-emphasized. Ann Cvetkovich, for example, is dissatisfied with the term because of the loss of the historical layering of affect work in the image of turn, with its revolutionary inflection ("Depression" 133). After all, one of the key authors on affect, Sedgwick, is also a celebrated critical theorist. Thus Patricia T. Clough argues that in many ways the affective turn has continued the poststructuralist project through its interest in the discontinuity of the subject (1). The linguistic turn already challenged the "superiority of 'detached reason' and 'objective observation' over the emotional and subjective" (Greco and Stenner 5) and can thus be seen as a building block of the affective turn rather than its opposite. However, while in the linguistic turn the study of emotions was strictly limited to discourse/text, today's affect scholars are invested in re-centering the body and matter (see Gregg and Seigworth 9) at least as a theoretical goal.

Needless to say, in the context of literature we cannot give up on the text and in the study at hand I analyze the realizations of affect in literary fiction. Although emotions are personal and interpersonal, I believe, following Sara Ahmed, that they are not just immediate, but mediated, "dependent on past interpretations that are not necessarily made by us" (*The Cultural* 171). Literary archives are among the sources of the ingrained past interpretations which shape our relationships with our and other bodies. Texts can perform and name different emotions. Cvetkovich sees cultural texts "as repositories of feelings and emotions" (*An Archive* 7). I am not so much interested in the archival function of texts as the agentive one: how and when emotions travel into and out of the archive and, above all, what kinds of effects they perform in textual practice when they "move, stick and slide" (Ahmed, *The Cultural* 14). The bodily-affective trajectory should not be divorced from social reality and structural processes especially since the popularity of the affective turn has perhaps also been paralleled by interest in the broader "emotionalization" of the public sphere (see Pantti and Van Zoonen). Criticism of ideology does not have to be abandoned while studying affect, but it has to be performed with a focus on complexity and dynamics (see Staiger, Cvetkovich, Reynolds 6). I am also drawn to Sedgwick's call for reparative rather than paranoid readings which acknowledge the richness of the everyday with its emotional vocabularies. Sedgwick believes that these reparative practices allow us to see "the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture — even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them" (*Touching* 150-51). I believe that these reparative practices can also be employed productively in the politics of gender in the context of comparative literature.

I take a dialogic perspective on theories of affect, being attracted to their potential, yet remaining skeptical of their political applicability. Building on the work of Ahmed and Lauren Berlant, I first flesh out the space of literature as a possible gendered intimate public sphere and investigate the political effects of emotions as cultural practices. Such intimate public spheres "foreground affective and emotional attachments located in fantasies of the common" (Berlant, *The Female* 10). Berlant has shown the effectiveness of sentimental literature of "female complaint" in creating lateral cultural identifications which help to defuse political tensions. I am interested in whether angry female complaints can disrupt political consensus. I then extend the discussion to Elo Viiding's negotiation of today's "happiness duty" and its attendant (political) tensions. Anger and depression, rather than happiness, emerge as the politically driving affects in this discussion. This work joins the rich political tradition of women's anger which has been documented by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar and, more recently, by Linda Grasso. The focus here is on a theoretical synthesis of somewhat disparate arguments and their contextualization into (comparative) literature.

Much is made in affect theory of the distinction between affect, feeling, and emotion. Yet, the terminology is anything but clear in scholarship and there is no unified understanding of the concept of affect. It has been defined in diverse ways "as excess, as autonomous, as impersonal, as the ineffable, as the ongoingness of process, as pedagogic-aesthetic, as virtual, as shareable (mimetic), as sticky, as collective, as contingency, as threshold or conversion point, as immanence of potential (futura), as the open, as a vibrant incoherence that circulates about zones of cliché and convention, as the gathering place of accumulative dispositions" (Gregg and Seigworth 9). Affect is usually taken back to the anti-Cartesian lineage of Spinoza and Bergson. Silvan Tomkins sees affect as biological and hard-wired, largely outside our intentions, beliefs, and ideologies. The psychoanalytical tradition has been relegated to the background of today's affect theory canon. However, much attention is given to Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's thought who believe affect to be the "active discharge of emotion, the counterattack whereas feeling is an always displaced, retarded, resisting emotion. Affects are projectiles just like weapons; feelings are introspective like tools" (400). Brian Massumi defines affect as a nonsignifying and nonconscious "intensity" that cannot be fully captured in language (*Parables* 30). What emerges from these strands is that affect is both biological-embodied and transversal. For most affect scholars, affect needs to be separated from emotions: "feelings are personal and biographical, emotions are social, and affects are prepersonal" (Shouse <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php>>) and "affect broadly refers to states of being, rather than to their manifestation or interpretation as emotions" (Hemmings 551). I use Terada's straightforward definition, which sees emotion as an "at least minimally interpretive experience whose physiological aspect is affect" (4). Ahmed is skeptical about the viability of a distinction that "negates how that which is not consciously experienced may itself be mediated by past experiences" (*The Cultural* 40). In her opinion, past histories can be evoked by bodily memories which bypass consciousness. Moreover, dwelling exclusively on affect would seem counterproductive in the study of literature or texts in other media and thus, while I do not over-emphasize the distinction between affect and emotion, for the sake of clarity I employ the notion of emotion because it refers to the political element of textually mediated emotion.

Some words of caution by critics of affect theories who influenced my thinking need to be added. Lawrence Grossberg suggests that affect theory is being used to cover too much ground and that the term has thus become somewhat "magical," marking anything that has non-representational effects, without doing the "harder work of specifying modalities and apparatuses of affect" (315). Although Grossberg is sympathetic to affect theory, he is disappointed in the articulations it has produced. Ruth Leys presents a thorough critique of the scientific underpinnings of affect theorists showing that their experimental evidence is occasionally inadequate and interpretations problematic. The focus on "subpersonal material-affective responses" leads to an indifference towards ideology and "the role of ideas and beliefs in politics, culture, and art in favor of an 'ontological' concern with different people's corporeal affective reactions" (Leys 450-51). As a result, the debate about different beliefs or ideas vanishes, replaced by a pluralist emphasis on what we feel or who we are. Further, Clare Hemmings invites us to consider the many ways in which affects are a mechanism of social reproduction rather than a radical challenge to it (551) and concludes that the affective turn is "advocating a new academic attitude rather than a new method, an attitude or faith in something other than the social

and the cultural, a faith in the wonders that might emerge if we were not so attached to pragmatic negativity" (563). Hemmings does not reject the value of affect, but its proponents' attempts to place it outside of the social context. Depoliticization through the overprivileging of the individual is a central feminist concern and although feminisms need to attend to the personal and the emotional, they are wary about the possible effacement of structural problems. Therefore, I focus on feminist scholars who seek to combine politics and affect constructively.

Ahmed's interest in "how emotions work to shape the 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies" (*The Cultural* 1) suggests a path to examine the structures of feeling and the feelings of structure because "feelings might be how structures get under our skin" (*The Cultural* 216). Emotions are understood to be "relational" in that they involve "(re)actions or relations of 'towardness' or 'awayness'" in relation to objects around us (Ahmed, *The Cultural* 8). Thus for Ahmed emotions are social: they "move, stick and slide" in texts, moving us and affecting others (14). Affective texts can be a bridge, rich with "texture" (Sedgwick, *Touching* 17), our embodied experience of the social world that can challenge social subjection. For example, in queer theory, shame has been reevaluated as transformative, thus challenging the received reading of the emotion (see Probyn; Sedgwick, *Shame*). However, Ahmed points out that it is emotions which "can attach us to the very conditions of our subordination" (*The Cultural* 12). This, she believes, helps to explain the difficulty of social transformation, as our affective attachment to social norms cannot necessarily be severed by collective forms of resistance (*The Cultural* 11-12). Although emotions can provide liberation, they can all too often also reproduce the normative and the hierarchical and they certainly do so in the context of gender. This tension is central to my argument as fiction may well be more successful in getting under a person's skin than political movements and hence detach readers from their affective affiliations to the social status quo.

Talking about the neoconservative Reagan era, Berlant stresses that the public sphere of the period had ceased to be a classed, raced and gendered locus of struggle and had become merely a scene of "personal acts and identities performed in the intimate domains of the quotidian" (*Queen* 5). The political public sphere became an intimate public sphere where social membership was "produced by personal acts and values, especially acts originating and directed toward the family sphere" (Berlant, *Queen* 5). Berlant's definition of intimate public in her 2008 *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* as that which "foregrounds affective and emotional attachments located in the fantasies of the common, the everyday, and a sense of ordinariness, a space where the social world is rich with anonymity and local recognitions" (10) is perhaps the best approach for my purposes: this sphere is textually mediated as it is through narratives that people are absorbed "into textually constructed positions of general subjectivity" (Berlant, *The Female* 10). Intimate publics are usually designated as apolitical, because "in an intimate public, the political sphere is more often seen as a field of threat, chaos, degradation, or retraumatization than a condition of possibility" (Berlant, *The Female* 11). Thus, when vocal critique does appear, it challenges the imaginary of the intimate public sphere as well as fantasies of femininity and social consensus around them.

Although the intimate public sphere that Berlant delineates evokes suffering, its optimistic orientation is towards future happiness. Berlant defines happiness as "cruel optimism," the maintaining of attachment to a problematic object (*Cruel*). This is not an optimism originating in the subject herself, but a repetition of the common sense of the culture (Ahmed, *The Cultural* 196). Ahmed also sees happiness as temporal, with negative emotions oriented to the past as something that prevents the subject from identifying herself with a supposedly happy future. While feminist and queer readings of negative emotions (like shame, hate, fear) have followed the same reparative trajectory from the unhappy to the happy, Ahmed skewers the desirability of happiness as a spoken and lived practice. The questions Ahmed raises are telling in the context of the present boom of happiness in both academia (i.e., Happiness studies) and consumer culture (self-management techniques like yoga or meditation as pathways to happiness): "Happiness can be what we want, a way of getting what we want, a sign that we have got what we want. If we are happy, then we are well; or we have done well" (*The Promise* 199). Further, Ahmed's suggestion is resonant in today's neoliberal consensus where doing well is ever more difficult and is thus often replaced by displays of happiness to mask failure, especially among the urban middle classes.

This prevails in the context of gendered personal aspirations. After all, the happiness myth of the housewife challenged by feminisms in the 1970s has today been over-inscribed by a generation of bloggers who celebrate motherhood, domesticity and attendant happiness in the public-private space of the internet (see Matchar). The rhetoric of happiness is challenging the supposed feminist orthodoxy of yesteryear and evades the fact that the workplace in many Western countries continues to make the combination of career and children difficult, to say the least (see Douglas). Admitting the influence of social forces on one's actions would mean admitting one's powerlessness and challenge the representation of one's domesticity as an agentive choice. The housewife bloggers are but one incarnation of today's happiness duty, their texts functioning as an example of a "hopeful performative" (Ahmed, *The Promise* 200). Feminists, in contrast, are read as unhappy because they question the status quo and refuse the outward signs of performative happiness. Ahmed argues that "feminism involves challenging the very 'pressure' of happiness, the way it restricts the possibility for finding excitement, of being excited" in places effaced in the status quo (*The Promise* 69). There continue to be clear limits in the seemingly permissive society of today in terms of what kinds of happiness counts (e.g., the conservative nature of today's support of gay marriage has been pointed out in recent queer writing: "the invitation to join the intimate public sphere ... is being ultimately offered only to members of families" [Berlant qtd. in Ruskola 245]).

In the rush towards future happiness, injustice and hurt may be erased or suppressed. Ahmed invites us to re-read the stubbornly unhappy subjects (like the "feminist killjoy" or "unhappy queer") whose refusal to give up unhappiness might "kill joy" but also "make room for life, to make room for possibility, for chance" (*The Promise* 20). People who challenge reigning happiness regimes can be called "affect aliens" who sense a "gap between the promise of happiness and how [we] are affected by objects that promise happiness" (Ahmed, *The Promise* 42). They, above all, "protest against the costs of agreement" (Ahmed, *The Promise* 213) with the dictates of disciplinary happiness: "not only do we want the wrong things, not only do we embrace possibilities that we have been asked to give up, but we create life worlds around these wants" (Ahmed, *The Promise* 218). This is not to say that we should struggle for unhappiness, live like the Savage in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, but that we should struggle against the inertia that lies behind the affirmative performatives of happiness. The political potential of these affect-alien texts, should they get under the skin of the audience, might lead readers to doubt the prescribed recipes of personal happiness and thus unsettle the intimate public sphere.

Scholars in comparative literature have always engaged in productive dialogues with different theoretical schools and affect theory is no different. Many of the scholars cited above have used literary examples in their work. However, few texts have delved into a serious discussion of affective archives and texts from outside English-language literature. Although affect theory has made much of the universality of emotions, the emotional archives of literature inevitably carry the burdens of history and culture more than psychological research, which in my opinion makes comparative mining of the emotional literary archives especially rewarding. Emotions central to these archives necessarily vary as different social contexts generate affective emphases which depend on the specific historical traces and traumas situated in different locations in time. Thus I apply Berlant's intimate public sphere and Ahmed's thinking on happiness to ask questions about women's fiction in Estonian in contrast to contemporary US-American women's writing. Little of Estonian literature is available in English translation, but in my opinion the Estonian case raises questions which should be interesting to a wider international audience. Estonia is in many ways a contradictory society, historically influenced by German culture and, because of the fifty years of Soviet occupation, suffering from post-socialist traumas familiar to all of East Europe (a literary portrait of that trauma can be found in the work of Sofi Oksanen).

Although Estonia is now a member of NATO, the European Union, and the Eurozone, it is the post-Soviet period that is central for my discussion. The ideological trajectories of Estonian society since the 1990s have been almost singularly neoliberal across the political spectrum as if to mark a definitive erasure of any Soviet legacy (see, e.g., Marling). Discourses of achievement and success have been embraced widely as bankers have replaced poets as cultural heroes. Success has become the measure of happiness and happiness itself a proof of one's success as Estonia moved from being a country with one of the highest suicide rates to one that runs a "Bank of Happiness." Estonia trails the

OECD Better Life Index and this makes the political and textual work necessary for self-presentation as one of the more successful nations of Europe even more intense. Estonia seems to be an excellent example of a nation lulled collectively into a cruel optimism. This ideological emphasis on success has softened somewhat owing to the spread of postmaterialist values and the sobering effects of the recent financial crisis and this ideological ambivalence calls for an in-depth investigation of literature, an archive where one would expect to find positions critical of the reigning cult of happiness and success.

I am focusing on gender because attitudes towards gender and gender equality continue to sharply differentiate Estonia from its Nordic neighbors. Estonia has masculinist values, high rates of educated, but underpaid women, no feminist movement and the country's political discourse has, in the context of low birth rates, publicly sanctioned pronatalism, exhorting women to bear children for the nation. For decades, politicians have explicitly congratulated Estonian women for ignoring the siren calls of Western feminism and instead devoting themselves to the supposedly happiness-guaranteeing orientations to domesticity and consumerism. Female voices deviating from this nationalist-neoliberalist-pronatalist ethos are thus especially interesting to me. The Estonian context is unique because today many US-American women writers seem to be delving into the domestic and celebrating it. Emily Matchar calls the wider social process "new domesticity" and records the contradictions inherent in a deep immersion in domesticity, a resurrection of not just domestic arts and environmentalist ethics, but also of essentialist gender stereotypes and obliviousness to the wider social processes. Kristin Jacobson identifies this trend as "neodomestic," but also argues that today's domestic fictions are not so much about the "master's house," but also about margins and relations with the outside (4). Despite this difference in directionality, today's fiction seems to lack a critical edge when it comes to parenthood. Shulamith Firestone seems to be a faint memory and books like Elisabeth Badinter's critique of modern attachment parenting find at best tepid reception. Above all, it is hard to find texts on the imperative of reproduction in the context where women in their forties are consoled that it is not too late to conceive (*No Kidding*, edited by Henriette Mantel, is an interesting case, but here the focus is on the choice of childlessness, not the social pressure of motherhood). There are also fewer texts of women's anger than in the 1970s, even in the context of the memoir-writing boom. The anger of the protagonist of Claire Messud's *The Woman Upstairs* is mentioned in most reviews, sometimes as refreshing, marking the rarity of this emotion. The Estonian case, I would hope, invites us not only to think about its specific affective archives, but also, perhaps, to interrogate critically the broader landscape of the emotional politics of women's fiction, one that has wider gender political repercussions as suggested by Francine Prose.

Berlant analyzes "juxtapolitical" texts which keep "people attached to disarming scenarios of necessity and optimism in their personal and political lives" (*The Female 2*), an affective confidence that encourages women to adapt to existing social arrangements. This genre of juxtapolitical literature dominates in the Estonian literary market too, testified to by the success of publishing house Petrone Print that produces a series of narratives of (mostly) women's travels to international locations from Moscow to Morocco, where they find fulfillment and love in a reiteration of Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love*. In a more critically acclaimed sphere, women's voices have also been mellow or sexualized, rarely angry and relegated to the literary ghetto of "women's literature" (see Ross). The juxtapolitical consensus is, however, fractured occasionally by angry and confident women's voices. Although such texts of women's anger might seem passé in the West, they are new and thus potentially transformative in the post-socialist Estonian context where the politics of gender is filtered out of the intimate public sphere as disruptive. The title of one of Kristiina Ehin's hybrid texts is telling: *Pillipuhujanaine ja pommipanijanaine* (Pipe-Playing Woman and Bomb-Planting Woman). I add that the situation in Estonia is not radically different from other post-Soviet countries such as Hungary (see, e.g., Barát; Vasvári <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2303>>).

I have chosen to discuss the work of an Estonian author in her late thirties: Elo Viiding's *Püha Maama* (Holy Mama) and *Teised* (Others). Viiding is not alone and similar strands can be found in other authors of roughly the same age group: Kätlin Kaldmaa's *Õnn on otsuse küsimus* (Happiness is a Matter of Choice) or Maarja Kangro's *Ahvid ja solidaarsus* (Monkeys and Solidarity). The age is worth stressing here as Viiding belongs to the generation that grew up under the Soviet regime, but has lived the majority of her adult life in the nationalist-neoliberal Estonia of today. This consciousness of

two political — and gender — regimes neither particularly attentive to women's agency or needs is an important marker. The pseudo-equality of the Soviet period produced slogans of gender parity but also created an almost sacralized culture of domesticity as a counterforce to the imposed public ideology. The post-Soviet era has not eased the schizophrenic demands on women in the public sphere and in the home and thus the triple "task" of women to perform professionally, as sexual partners and as mothers remains the rule. However, there is no major difference, in principle and in practice, between post-Soviet countries and the West and gender equality remains elusive (see, e.g., (Tötösy de Zepetnek "Women's Literature," "A Manifesto" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/gendermanifesto>>). Authors with the experience of two systems seem to be given an ability to deconstruct ironically the happiness of juxtapolitical narratives of good life/good femininity on both sides of the ideological divide.

The consciousness of the gendered ironies of the two eras informs Viiding's writing. She does not self-identify as a feminist, yet many of the questions she raises have a gender-political edge. I start my discussion from her one prose piece available in English because it also creates that connection between the Soviet and post-Soviet consciousness. "Foreign Women" is an opening into Estonian women's emotional archives. The first-person narrator, a child, is split between the attraction to Western women with their painted lips and liberated ways and Soviet women who are gaunt and tend towards depression and exhaustion. The foreign women are described as bringing with them a whiff of expensive perfume, uninhibited behavior in the company of men, and creative panache. Yet they are not the ideal role models as they are selfish, spoiled, and naïve victims of the double standards of the beauty industry and New-Agey attitudes. We are not sure whether the narrator agrees with the women's belief that they are being taken seriously by men. She is confident, however, that "they would not have sat by and watched their health and good looks be systematically destroyed over the course of their lives by any so-called intellectual of the male persuasion" (78) like their Soviet counterparts.

Viiding is most scathing on the division of labor between the dissident intellectual husbands and their spouses: the wife had to be "always bright, alert, effective, discreet, handy, and well-liked; she never whined, never drank or talked too much, knew when to make herself scarce, knew how to sacrifice her own needs when necessary; was simultaneously ladylike, childishly dependent, politely adult, and wise as an old sage" (80). This stance is culturally sanctioned and embraced by women in the stagnant social and gender regime. As the narrator states, the local women "did not, unfortunately, learn anything from the foreign women and one or two became completely convinced that their single duty in life was simply to keep their husbands alive" (77). The narration's cool bitterness leaves no illusions about the burden of this existence contrasted with the superficial and selfish foreign women with whom the husbands have affairs and whose greatest strength is their ability to leave. Yet there is also a clear — if hopeless — anger about the cult of a limiting femininity that ultimately cements men's privilege. Although written about the past, it invites readers to consider today's situation when many of the newly Western women of Estonia still cling to Soviet gender habits. They may have lipstick and perfume, but they also retain the marital submissiveness in greater comfort and with the greater burden of (maternal) happiness.

In her collection *Püha Maama* (Holy Mama) Viiding writes that "no, we do not have to speak about life at all, that which we live, because, if we are in contact with our life and ourselves, if we are adequate, honest and feel pain, disgust, pleasure, anger and joy, it will always cost us dearly — we are not loved, we are abandoned and we are always and only guilty of that ourselves" (131; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). This reference to emotions discouraged in the performatively happy cultural context invites one to think about the costs of agreement and the burdens of being an affect alien in a culture that is in an optimistic denial of reality. The collection creates perhaps too sharp a contrast between women who buy diapers and women who buy books, to borrow a comparison from an interview with Viiding (see Lotman <<http://www.postimees.ee/1802509/elo-viiding-arritab-lugejat>>). The figure evoked is that of a contemporary quasi-saint, a woman with a child, an adjusted and unreflecting member of a society that values women for their reproductive capacity. In the same interview Viiding states that her heroine is a completely ordinary person, a young mother who meets society's expectations, yet does not fully fit in with her combination of spirituality and materialism. This is paralleled with Viiding's

poem "Mothers' Day," which juxtaposes ironically the official political veneration of mothers and the lived reality of mothering with withering asides at class and consumerism:

On Mothers' Day every child should sing
and give its mother flowers and prime ministers think
that every mother wants to be honoured
and all prime ministers dream
that all women who aren't mothers
will feel simply feel rotten
more rotten than ever before
so the government gives mothers
special advantages
and passes a law on parental salaries. (<<http://nordicvoices.blogspot.com/2009/05/elo-viiding-mothers-day.html>>)

Viiding's text expresses a range of emotions through a variety of women characters not necessarily always likeable. For example, in "Toomas ja Elsa" (Toomas and Elsa) (Viiding, *Püha* 50-70) the narrator admits that the only thing she understands is stubborn and defiant selfishness. However, her selfishness does not exclude social critique and opposition to the complacency of the intimate public sphere. In the story this is voiced in relation to the socially sanctioned demand to reproduce — the demand that Viiding strips of all the sentimental emotional investment expected in women's intimate public and certainly in the Estonian intimate public sphere. Instead, she signals the fact that babies are needed as obedient servants of a system that values uniformity (this is also echoed in the cover illustration of the Estonian edition with its tightly swaddled interchangeable infants in a neat row). Love becomes a duty (e.g., in the novella "Jaam" [Station] (Viiding, *Püha* 100-104) and even love between parents and children cannot be guaranteed unconditionally, e.g., in "Material Girls" (the use of the English phrase is suggestive) (Viiding, *Püha* 10-12). Viiding has no positive program to offer in the collection: she sets out to cover the dark void and force readers to confront it.

Viiding's 2012 collection of short stories *Teised* (Others) is about not-belonging as signaled already by the story of the title (17-55). It juxtaposes the lives of two sisters: one successful in her professional and personal life and confident in her happiness, the other a failure, unhappy, and alone. It is the unhappiness that is mined here and traced back to the past and the protagonist's refusal to live out her own life (in Ahmed's terms to make room for life and chance outside of the familiar). She "inherits," as it were, her mother's suffering as a badge of honor and remains locked in a system of passivity. Viiding uses mirrored characters in her other stories too inviting us to question who is the self and who the excluded other. For example, in "Oleme muutunud paikseks" ("We Have Become Settled") (Viiding, *Teised* 7-16) we are subjected to the trivial verbal barrage of everyday life which the privileged protagonist believes she controls. The juxtaposition with a nearly homeless woman who appears happier than the successful home maker makes this control seem at best tenuous and even her monologue conveys barely suppressed fear of loss. The material aspirations are represented as a duty and the guarantee of happiness and perhaps even dignity the public recognition of success. We are also reminded that the success of the "winners" can only happen at the expense of the excluded others.

We cannot believe the happiness of the supposed winners/selves of the juxtaposition that dominates the collection: the women have chosen the dominant narrative of happiness, the approved mode of self-construction that guarantees survival. Yet their happiness, success, and survival do not ultimately persuade. Women occasionally seem to be distanced from their own bodies and cannot articulate the split: it is easier to be other to oneself and closed off from the world. The collection is less angry than the previous one, perhaps, but no less unrelenting in its delving into the depths of what is happiness or unhappiness and what happenstance might separate the two. Viiding's angry voice dissects the holy cows of Estonian intimate public, especially those related to maternity and femininity more broadly. An evident affect alien, she writes in anger refusing the peacefulness of the juxtapositional position. She has set herself the task of protesting against the costs of agreement both in the Soviet past and the neoliberal present of Estonia. She refuses her own "duty" of happiness making it harder for her readers to identify with the platitudes of the intimate public sphere. We might ask, of course, whether texts like Viiding's really do constitute an intimate public sphere or whether they are automatically excluded from it because of their non-conformity. Yet, the fact that *Püha*

Maama actually sold out indicates that it found readers also among the intimate publics usually not associated with feminist sentiments. Affective attachments are hard to control and it is possible to believe that even a partial identification with a (feminist) killjoy could shake the consensus-oriented lateral identifications of other women and awaken them to happenstance in life. It is, however, equally possible to suggest that anger can be co-opted by segregating it from the intimate sphere as a "female complaint" and thus dulling its political edge.

In conclusion, the above questions cannot be answered definitively, but the possibility of writing through the tension suggests the potential of the politics of emotion. This is not yet another paranoid feminist interpretation, but a sort of a reparative reading as it seeks out the texture of experience in one specific identity location, namely post-socialist Estonia and the sharpened experiences of gender it evokes. The fact that gendered tensions gather around reproduction — both of children and of reigning materialist values — invites us to think of the parallel, but contrasting gendered anxieties and angers in other literary contexts. The archives will necessarily be different and placed at different points in time, but bodies will catch feelings from them and thus these narratives contribute to shaping the surfaces of our individual and collective bodies. Not only in the country of origin: in the case of international fiction, affect alien texts which get under our skins invite us to confront our own emotional investments. Sliding from one cultural context to another, they can chafe with their unfamiliarity, but also stick and challenge us to face the costs of our agreement to our happiness or other emotional regimes. This recognition places emotion and politics in a productive dialogue in the context of (comparative) literary analysis.

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Author's profile: Raili Marling teaches US-American studies and cultural theory at the University of Tartu. Her interests in scholarship include discourses of gender and power, politics of masculinity, and tensions around gender in the post-socialist context. Marling's recent publications include "Strong Women and the Masculinity Crisis: Adulterous Appropriations of the Old Testament," *Neohelicon: acta comparationis litterarum universarum* (2013), the edited collection *Sissejuhatus soouuringutesse* (2011) (Introduction to Gender Studies), and "The Intimidating Other: Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of Feminism in Estonian Print Media," *Nora: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* (2010). E-mail: <raili.marling@ut.ee>