

Remembering mother:
Relations and memory in the biographical project on
Minna Krohn (1841–1917)

Maarit Leskelä-Kärki

Biography will enlarge its scope by hanging up looking glasses at odd corners. And yet from all this diversity it will bring out, not a riot of confusion, but a richer unity.¹

This chapter is about contradictory and relational narratives. I will analyse the ways individuals are described, written about and remembered within their close relations and ask, how we, as biographers, could make use of the varied and often also conflicting material produced on past persons. In this case, the material is both visual and textual, both fictional and documentary. The underlying idea will be to question the idea of a coherent life-story, 'a life as a given entity'². Following the above notion by Virginia Woolf's famous essay 'The Art of Biography', I examine how various looking glasses could perhaps help us in encountering the unknown past persons and act as paths towards the past persons in a way that would allow many voices and contradictions.

¹ Woolf 1942, electronic source.

² Brockmeier 2001, 247.

I will start by showing one 'odd corner' of my study: a painted portrait depicting the main character of my research. In 1888, the Finnish painter Maria Wiik painted a portrait of Minna Krohn, the former school mistress of the Finnish Girls' School in Helsinki. The portrait was among the many official portraits painted of the school's directors. Although the portrait could be looked at merely as an official portrait painted within the boundaries of the conventions of official portraits, I will, at the conclusion of this chapter, stretch its boundaries a bit further and discuss the possible ways it could be used as part of a biographical analysis on Minna Krohn's life. Before this, I will contrast the painting with some textual narratives, other 'odd corners', produced on her, and see what these diverse corners might convey to a biographer. My focus will be on the different relations surrounding Minna Krohn during her lifetime, and I will use Adriana Cavarero's idea on relational identity as a starting point. I aim to show how a biography can be written from the perspective of various, conflicting narratives surrounding the individual. In this, my chapter closely discusses with Birgitte Possing's contribution, where she illuminates the methodological paths on how she decided to construct a polyphonic portrait of Danish politician and minister Bodil Koch.

Silenced figure – or not?

To begin with, Maria Wilhelmiina Lindroos (later Minna Krohn, 1841–1917) could be presented as a forgotten and, in part, also mis-handled figure of the influential Krohn family – she was not a famous or heroic figure befitting of the canon of those generally written about in biographical form. She was born in a modest, lower middle-class, Swedish-speaking family, where her father was a self-taught man, who also wanted to educate his daughters. From a nationalistic and religious background, Minna Lindroos became educated as a school teacher, and was later appointed as the director of the first Finnish-speaking girls' school in Helsinki. Eventually, she married a famous professor, poet and nationalist Julius Krohn, who had just lost his wife, and became mother



Portrait of Minna Krohn, Director of Finnish Girls' School in Helsinki. Painted by Maria Wiik 1888. (Helsinki University Museum)

to three stepchildren and two biological daughters. Widowed in 1888 and suffering from depression, which evolved into severe depression for nearly the last two decades of her life (1900–1917), she hardly seems to be a figure worth a heroic biography. Yet, she had been educated abroad,

belonged to the first generation of girls' school teachers, worked among the nationalist (Fennoman) circles (later becoming part of a Finnish-speaking nationalist home after marrying Julius Krohn), and as a school director before her marriage as well as wrote poems and children's stories and edited a children's magazine *Pääskynen*. For a researcher, her life seems to be full of conflicting aims and circumstances.

During the process of writing my earlier research about the Krohn sisters, it became obvious that the sisters' mother was a complex character in their lives. She was not so much a strong, encouraging mother, but a very contradictory and tragic figure. The sisters shared the same father in professor, poet and nationalist activist Julius Krohn, but they had different mothers. The eldest, Helmi Krohn (1871–1967), was from Julius Krohn's first marriage to Emma Krohn. There were also two older boys, Kaarle and Ilmari, from this marriage. Emma Krohn died in 1874 when Helmi was three years old, and soon after, her father remarried with a family friend, Minna, and they had another two daughters, Aino (1878–1956) and Aune (1881–1967).

Each of the sisters had a unique and difficult relationship with their mother. Aino and Aune faced their mother's mental imbalance from quite early on, since Julius Krohn died accidentally in 1888, when Aune was only seven years and Aino ten years old. After that, Minna Krohn's health never recovered and she visited hospitals occasionally. At the turn of the century, her depression became more severe, and in 1900–1917, she spent most of her time in bed at home or in mental hospitals. As the youngest of the sisters, Aune Krohn was yet unmarried, and it was agreed that she would be suitable for taking care of their mother. She lived with Minna Krohn (together with changing nurses) until her mother died in 1917, and suffered, herself, from depression occasionally. Thus, Aune Krohn's relationship with her mother was the most intimate one, and she had to cope with the mother's illness most severely. For Aino Kallas, her mother's mental illness was difficult to cope with and, when she moved abroad after her marriage to Estonian Oskar Kallas in 1900, her relationship with her mother became characterised by guilt for not being around there for her in Helsinki. For Helmi Krohn, Minna always remained a stepmother, and the tragedy of losing her own mother followed her throughout her life.

My starting point for the biography project is the multi-layered biographical material that the sisters produced on their mother.³ Although it seems at first glance that their mother was a forgotten and silenced figure, she was actually much discussed and debated, and thus remembered, by her daughters in their mutual correspondence. They all also wrote about their mother; Aino Kallas and Helmi Krohn wrote about her in a novel and Aune Krohn in a memoir book and some articles. The relations and dynamics between the daughters and the mother are of most importance. Minna Krohn's case seems to offer a fruitful basis for studying how life-stories are constructed in different forms of remembrance and how they are, thus, deeply relational.

Relations

In terms of relationality, I refer to Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero's ideas on relational identities. Cavarero has inspired many feminist scholars with her ideas on relative narratives originating from her book *Relating narratives* (2001).⁴ Cavarero points out how identity does not reveal a deepest intimate self-identity, it only expresses what is being performed, since 'one always appears to someone': 'Who each one is, is revealed to others when he or she acts in their presence in an interactive theater where each is, at the same time, actor and spectator.' Referring mostly to autobiographical narration, she claims how our identity comes into being through exposure and relation to others, from the outside and through the stories that others tell. Thus, we could also see her defending the biographer and the overall process of narrating a life, as she points out how every life becomes justified through the act of nar-

³ This chapter does not intend to cover all the possible material that can be used in this biographical research. There are also other materials, such as correspondence between the two stepsons, as well as between the married couple and other textual material on Minna Krohn. Due to limited space, I will mostly concentrate on the relations between mother and daughters.

⁴ See Cavarero 2000 24–33. See also e.g. Jansdotter 2008; Leskelä-Kärki 2008, 2011; Tamboukou 2010a, 2010b; Liljeström 2012.

ration.⁵ In this biographical research, I will try to follow Cavarero's ideas in analysing the different narratives constructed on Minna Krohn. They are all equally important for me in trying to capture something valuable of her life, her identity and her 'after-image'.

Sidonie Smith and Julie Watson have argued that relationality is still one of the most important concepts of autobiographical or life-narrative studies. The relationality of a subject can be seen as the core existence of our psychic life, narrative encounters and whole of our humanity.⁶ When we look at one individual life as related to other people and networks of people, we get a much richer and more contradictory picture. This perspective shows how one life is never to be told as a whole, but that it consists of changing perspectives, changing relations and different situations, which form our lives, taking us in, sometimes, unexpected directions.

Relationality happens, also, in the close relationship between biographer and the one he/she writes about. We encounter people from the past through the sources they have left, by chance or through a conscious effort to preserve. Either way, the sources we have are always partial and limited.⁷ As the biographer is dependent upon the source material, we could say that our interpretations are already constructed and filtered because of these archival processes. This is why the relationality between the one who narrates and the narratee is so vital. This interaction happens during the research process and, thus, we could see that writing a biography is also about acknowledging and reflecting on this interaction. In Cavarero's words, we come to understand the uniqueness of every life-story.⁸ As biographers become deeply involved with past lives, they become interpreters, actors, close bystanders, who also become affected by the stories they read and by the interpretations they construct.

⁵ Cavarero 2000, 11, 24–27, 34, 81–93.

⁶ Smith and Watson 1998, 2010.

⁷ About archival processes, women's archives and the multiple ways an archive can be shaped before a researcher even has an access to it, see for example Dever, Vickery and Newman 2009, 3–35.

⁸ Cavarero 2000, 32–45.

In the biographical project concerning Minna Krohn, relationality refers both to the actual relations that Minna Krohn had, in this case, particularly, with her daughters. It could also be viewed, however, from a more abstract perspective concerning the different places in which she has been narrated, including her daughter's textual archives (fiction, letters, articles, memoirs) and other relatives' memoirs, as well as in other forms, including the portrait painted of her or the photographs taken of her. What is left from Minna Krohn are precisely stories. Stories that not only tell about her but also about the history of daughters and mothers, the history of women's societal activity in the nineteenth century and the history of women's mental illnesses. Getting close to Minna Krohn's life means admitting the necessary value of these stories as part of the larger picture of women's history.

Except for the writings of her daughters, there have never been any published texts or biographies on Minna Krohn. The figure of the withdrawn mother has remained powerful, for example, in the narratives on the life of her famous daughter, writer Aino Kallas or the influential Krohn family. Only in 2005, when Pertti Lassila published a biography on Julius Krohn, did a new image of Minna Krohn start to appear. He pointed out that although their marriage was not a romantic affair, it could be regarded as a happy and equal marriage of two like-minded individuals.⁹

The daughters narrated their mother's life in various genres: in letters, fiction, diaries, memoirs, as well as in documentary and biographical texts. I am interested in the different narrative identities that were articulated in their various textual materials, both published and unpublished, and how the daughters thus participated in the construction of the life-story of Minna Krohn. There is also the narrative that is constructed in the autobiographical material of Minna Krohn, which I will, in the following, discuss as well. The web created by these different textual and visual narratives, their relations, clashes, sameness and differences, will be the main focus of the future biographical research.

⁹ Lassila 2003, 83–85.

Fictionalised mother

First, I will examine the two narrative images constructed of Minna Krohn in fiction, written by her daughter Aino Kallas and stepdaughter Helmi Krohn.

Helmi Krohn was 36 years old when she started writing her fifth novel about her family history and the old family mansion, *Kiiskilä*, in Viipuri. The central figure in her novel *Vanhon kartanon tarina* [Tale of the Old Mansion, 1907] is Eva Manner, a nurse who marries Doctor Erik Leopold and steps, as an outsider, into the life of his distinguished family and their mansion. The novel concentrates on the contradictions and conflicts Eva has to confront in her new surroundings. Eva's ideas of family life and the connection between a husband and wife do not correspond with the old, conservative ideals of a collective and patriarchal family. Eva represents a more modern female type, who is contrasted against Erik's dead wife, the idealised Anna. Eva's loneliness in the mansion and among the family is described as a painful experience, and it makes Eva age rapidly. Her experiences squash her joyful trust in life, and her own feelings of power, and she even starts to regret her decision to marry Erik. Eva Manner's character analyses the possibilities of a modern woman, the changing roles of husband and wife, and the rupture of old, patriarchal family ties.

Focusing on Eva and her life-story right from the beginning, the sympathies of the readers are on Eva's side. The narrator describes Eva, when she enters the family mansion with her husband, as follows:

A happy smile made her slightly sharp face more beautiful, and that inner light that flowed from her eyes and circled her changed her somewhat ordinary face into an almost beautiful vision. The near ascetic simplicity and strictness, which was so characteristic of them, dis-

appeared. And a youthful, almost childish expression appeared, an expression that had been rare even in her youth.¹⁰

Read against the family background and Helmi Krohn's own experiences as a stepdaughter, the novel is surprising as it empathises with Eva Manner and shows her tragic destiny as understandable. It feels as though Helmi Krohn would have tried, through her novel, to find psychological and social reasons for their family dynamics and for Minna Krohn's illness. Her novel could be analyzed as a fictional and psychological biography of Minna Krohn, as her focus stays on Eva throughout the book, albeit intertwined with another central figure, namely Eva's stepdaughter Siiri. This is also interesting with regard to Helmi Krohn's own literary career, as she published only one more novel after this one and then turned to writing biographies during the 1910s and 1920s. Later, she wrote about Minna Krohn in her biography on her father Julius Krohn (1942), and also in a diary novel for young girls, *Eeva-Liisa*, that depicted her own childhood and youth.

Aino Kallas published her novel *Katinka Rabe* in 1920 at the age of 42. This novel is a special one among Kallas' works, as it is one of the two literary works in her wide repertoire since 1900 that did not deal with Estonian history, culture and folklore. It is a strongly fictionalised, impressionistic novel about a young girl Katinka Rabe, her childhood and her relations with the family heritage, her father, mother and the Rabe family. The novel has been seen as an impressionistic one, as it is fragmented, lyrical and subjective. It has also been analysed as an autobiographical novel and an artist novel that discusses women's possibilities to be an artist.¹¹ It can also be seen as a story of a young girl of *fin*

¹⁰ [‘Onnellinen hymy kaunisti hiukan teräviä kasvoja, ja tuo sisällinen valo, joka virtasi hänen silmistänsä ja ikään kuin kehänä ympäröi häntä, muurti herkkittäm hänen jokseenkinjokapäiväiset kasvonsa kauniiksi. Niistä karosi silloin se miltei askeettinen yksinkertaisuus ja ankaruus, joka niille muuten oli niin ominainen. Ja nuorekas melkein lapsellinen ilme sai niissä vallan, ilme, jota ne tuskin ensi nuoruudessaakaan olivat tunteneet.’] Translation MLK. Setälä 1907. Helmi Krohn used her married name Setälä until 1913, when she got divorced. All her novels came out under the name Helmi Setälä, except for the first one that was under the pseudonym Anni Kurki.

¹¹ Lappalainen 1995.

de siècle debating about family relations, and, particularly, about girls' relationships with her father and mother.

Contrary to Helmi Krohn's novel, the focus in *Katinka Rabe* is on the child – the subtitle of the book is 'A book of a child'. The mother in the book works as a contrasting image for the growing girl and her identity. The relationship between the mother and the daughter is represented as impossible. This is highlighted in a conflict where the three-year-old Katinka hits her mother back after being hit by her.¹²

The mother is represented as a lonely figure in the mansion of Hovi with no control over her own life. Katinka's mother does not have any power over the lifestyle of the mansion or its inhabitants, and her own children slip away from her. The difference between mother and daughter is represented in a scene where Katinka sees her mother painfully crying in her room, alone:

Mother twisted her large, freckled hands, and Katinka heard how the joints in her fingers clicked. Katinka's heart divided into two: one part told her to bug her mother, to comfort her, and to say how she loved her mother, that her mother was a thousand times more beloved and better than any other, that she was more beautiful, really, more beautiful than Aunt Agnes Wrensky, than Mrs Adaridi or Mrs Ripas, than anybody, anybody... But the other part in her made her stiffen and speechless; strange suffering made her cold; it was as if she felt ashamed because of her mother.¹³

The possibility for a shared mutual experience turns into a feeling of shame. The mother and her family do not set any examples for Katinka's artistic ambitions – the mother represents a still and modest woman-

¹² Kallas (1920) 1938, 191.

¹³ ['Äiti väänteli isoja, teerenpilkkuisia käsiään, ja Katinka kuuli, kuinka sorminiivelet naksahitivat. Katinkan sydän jakautui kuin kahtia: toinen käski heittäytyämään äidin kaulaan, lohduttamaan, että hän Katinka rakastaa äitiä, että äiti on tuhat kertaa rakkaampi ja parempi kuin kaikki muut, kauniimpi, niin juuri, kauniimpikin kuin täti Agnes Wrensky, kuin rouva Adaridi tai rouva Ripas, kuin kaikki, kaikki... Mutta toinen jäykisti sanat omaksi; vieras kärsimys kylmäsi; ikään kuin hävetti äidin takia.'] Translation MLK. Kallas (1920) 1938, 266–267.

hood that is tied only to motherhood and its conventions and norms. She wanders throughout the book in silence, without a voice of her own. Thus, the mother is represented very differently from the mother of Helmi Krohn's *Eva Manner*. Possibly it was easier for Helmi Krohn to be empathetic and analytical, since she had a mother of her own that she could idealise. In contrast, Katinka has a close and warm relationship with her father, and the narrator constantly identifies with Katinka and her feelings towards her father. The heritage of the Rabe family is an important part of Katinka's identity, and Katinka is meant to carry on with the Rabe family's tradition through her own, future artistic work.

Mother, in the context of national history

The youngest daughter, Aune Krohn, became active with her mother's history later on in her life. She was the only one of the sisters who wanted to showcase their mother as a professional, as part of the women's educational history in Finland. She was interested in finding out about the history of their mother, of her personality before her marriage and of the background for her illness. In her short biographical texts on Minna Krohn written in the 1950s, Aune Krohn saw her as one of the silent and forgotten women of the nationalist era, and she wanted to present her mother's life's work to a larger audience:

As a matter of fact, she was talented and had varied skills; she sang, drew beautifully, had a good sense of colour and shape, and wrote. If the times had been different and she would have had Finnish as her mother-tongue, maybe she could have developed her skills further. They were drowned by an incomplete education, home and illness, and perhaps, by her being bilingual.¹⁴

¹⁴ [Itse asiassahan hän oli lahjakas ja monipuolinen; lauloi, piirsi kauniisti, omasi hyvän väri- ja muotoaistin, ja kirjoitteli. Jos aika olisi ollut toinen ja hän itse yksinomaisesti suomenkielinen, niin ehkä hänen lahjoistaan olisi voinut kehittyä enemmän. Ne hukkuivat puolinäisiin opintoihin. kotiin ja sairauteen, ja kai myös kaksikielisyysseen.'] Translation MLK. Aune Krohn's letter to Aino Kallas 16 November 1947, SKS.

Aune Krohn published articles in magazines and, later, in a memoir collection *Menneitten aikojen tarinaa* [Tales from the past, 1955]. Her interest in the history of her mother was connected to her growing interest in the family history. She was interested in her mother's past both on the individual level and as part of the larger national context. Also, some other biographers noticed Minna Krohn's important role as the long-term teacher and director of the Finnish Girls' School. When Finnish writer and biographer Tyyni Tuulio was, in 1955, writing the biography of Otilie Stenbäck, the most influential director of this Girls' School in Helsinki, she wrote to Aune Krohn and showed her interest in Minna Krohn's influence as well:

In terms of your mother, her character is alluring and her destiny so peculiar, that I would like to – if I just have time and the energy – to write more about her in some connection.¹⁵

For the first time, Minna Krohn was shown in her professional role from an outsider's perspective, and Aune Krohn must have been intrigued by this interest. Tuulio's comment did not connect their mother with the melancholic, withdrawn person as seen in the family memorabilia. Tuulio did not write a book on Minna Krohn, but she did ask about the daughter's possible role in writing the history of their mother, and this must have been influential to Aune.

Aune Krohn connected her mother's forgotten past with other forgotten female professionals from the nationalist decades of the nineteenth century. She wrote many other articles on these women, and felt strongly that she had to 'lift these women up' from history and 'defend the defenceless'.¹⁶ She felt a duty towards her mother's history and her active professional role. For her part, she constructed the national history of the nineteenth century and women's role in it, and was aware of

¹⁵ [Mirä muuten tulee äitiinne, on hänen hahmonsansa jotenkin niin puoleen-savetävä ja kohtralonsa erikoinen, että joskus mielelläni jossakin yhteydessä – jos elinpäiviä ja työvoimaa riittää – kirjoitaisin hänestä enemmän.] Aune Krohn tells about this letter in her letter to Aino Kallas 1 November 1950, SKS.

¹⁶ References to Aune Krohn's texts, see Leskelä-Kärki 2006, 193–194.

the role of these early women teachers and pedagogues, who had also granted her the possibility to study and be educated.

Minna Krohn in letters and notebooks

What did Minna Krohn herself write, what kind of material is left from her? Like so many nineteenth-century women and men, she wrote hundreds of letters during her lifetime to her husband, her children, other relatives and close ones. Since the Krohn family archives have been well preserved, many of them are available in the literary archives of the Finnish Literature Society. These letters reveal how Minna Krohn acted in her surroundings and how she took care of family matters.

One interesting source material is her collection of remaining notebooks, to which Aune Krohn refers in a letter to her sister, long after her mother's death:

This diary consists, in part, of something unhealthy, but also healthy and certainly something genuine for mother. So it seems to serve as some sort of a key to her closed inner world as a result of her difficult life and illness.¹⁷

She refers to the three black notebooks as diaries, although they do not seem to carry the full meaning of diary in the sense of our understanding of a diary; they are not full of inner thoughts and analysis, nor are they even daily descriptions of what has happened. The books seem more to represent the genre of a notebook, although it is important to notice that the genres of both diary and a notebook are never clearly definable. Minna Krohn has written in her books about her notions concerning language and words. She writes in Finnish, Swedish and

¹⁷ Aune Krohn's letter to Aino Kallas 10 October 1948, SKS. [Osin on siinä päiväkirjassa jollakin lailla sairasta, mutta toisaalta tervettäkin ja varmasti mammalle luonteenomaista, niin että se tavallaan on jonkinlainen avain hänen sulkeutuneeseen sisimpäänsä, elämän järkytyksen ja sairauden sulkemaan.] Translation MLK.

German. She writes very short reflections of her children, religion, her health etc. The writings are, however, very sporadic, fragmentary, and the notebooks cover only a few years of her life, from the years 1904–1906. It seems that they end when her illness becomes more severe, and no later notebooks have been found.

An important view on Minna Krohn's life in the early years of the 1900s can be drawn from Aune Krohn's letters to her sisters. As Aune Krohn lived with her mother and took care of her together with a nurse, she reported on their mother's condition to her sisters, and also reflected on her own situation beside the depressed mother.¹⁸ We get a layered image of Minna Krohn, a representation of her illness and condition through the eyes of her daughter, from an authentic place and time, but, of course, an already interpreted one. On 6 November 1900, she writes:

Mummy is still tied in bed, but the doctor predicts that the healing process is progressing, step by step. It would be better if mummy, herself, would believe in it, and if her melancholy mind would slightly disappear. If she does not grieve for one thing, she grieves for another, and she can't grab onto moments of joy that still occur for everyone here amidst this despair. Seeing Kaarle [her eldest stepson] is always

good for her and occasionally makes her smile. When seeing Helmi, she withdraws into herself and is timid and quiet.¹⁹

In November 1900, Aune Krohn refers to her mother's health as 'silent', by which she means that her mother is not terribly ill, but the process of getting better is happening very slowly, 'in millimetres'. One can follow the phases of illness quite closely from Aune Krohn's letters during 1900–1917, but a challenge for the research is that Minna Krohn's own voice, her words and interpretations remain invisible, as is so often the case with patients with mental illness. In her own notebooks, she refers to her illness only on a few occasions and on a very general level. Kirsi Tuohela, who has studied Finnish autobiographies on mental illness, points out how rare these texts are in the early decades of the twentieth century. The first ones written by women are from the 1920s and 1930s.²⁰

Portraying Minna Krohn

After reading the daughter's materials on their mother, the portrait painted by Maria Wiik came as a revelation to me. This portrait from 1888 had not been publicly presented, as it was ordered by the Finnish Girls' School and had been hanging on the walls of the school from the 1880s onwards until it was put in an exhibition at the museum of the University of Helsinki in 2012. Although a biography can never resolve a person's identity or her life-story as a whole, this painting seemed to round out the whole of Minna Krohn's narrative, since it depicts her in

¹⁹ [‘Mammi on yhä vuoteenomana, mutta tohtori arvelee, että paraneminen käy – askelin eteenpäin. Se kävisi kai vielä paremmin, jos mamma itse siihen uskoisi, ja jos hänen alakuloisuutensa hiukan hälvenisi. Jos ei hän sure toista, niin suree toista, eikä voi tarrua niihin ilon muruihin, joita sentään putoaa muutamia jokaisen osaksi täällä murteen alhossa. Kaartlen näkeminen tekee hänelle aina hyvää, silloin hän toisinaan hymyilee. Helmiä nähdessä sitä vastoin hän kuin vetäytyy kokoon, on arka ja hiljainen.’] Aune Krohn's letter to Aino Kallas 6 November 1900, SKS.

²⁰ Tuohela 2015.

¹⁸ In this chapter it is not possible to go further into analysing Krohn's illness further. It is, though, worth mentioning, that at this time, during the early 1900s, the new psychiatry was a fast developing field, and the diagnoses of mental unstable conditions were changing. The diagnoses of *schizophrenia* and *psychosis manico-depressiva* were starting to be used during the early decades of this century. On the history of mental illness in Finland and the autobiographical narratives related to that, see e.g. Tuohela 2015. Minna Krohn was also taken care of in some mental institutions in Helsinki, such as Tallbacka and Kammiö, and an influential psychiatric doctor (first one appointed in Finland) Christian Sibelius diagnosed her disease as well. The daughters talk about illness, and use words such as nerves, melancholia [alakulo], tiredness etc. to describe their mother's condition. One of the aims of my biographical research will be to analyse their interpretations of her illness, and view them as culturally produced. Here, I have chosen to use the more modern concept of depression to describe her condition.

the role of a teacher and professional woman, not as a mother or a wife. It inspired me to find new 'odd corners' of her life on which to shed light.

The portrait was painted the same year as Julius Krohn died, after the couple had been married for 12 years. It seems that the portrait was made during the spring, since Julius Krohn died in August and, after that, Minna Krohn was unbalanced for a longer period. The Girls' School must have ordered a painting of their former director, since Minna Krohn did not work at the school any more during the 1880s. At the same time, the school ordered paintings of other former teachers and important persons in the school's history, and Maria Wiik painted some of these as well.

The portrait shows a strong, calm and harmonious Krohn in her professional role as one of the first women school directors. She looks very strong, calm and severe, and like Pia Katerma, who analysed Maria Wiik's production in the 1950s analyses, it is an official picture that has 'inspired its painter to a beautiful, harmonic solution'. Katerma notices how Minna Lindroos' eyes are full of wisdom and she is soulful and balanced.²¹

As a woman painter, Maria Wiik was exceptional, since she was the only woman to paint official portraits during the 1880s. Wiik was among the group of Finnish women artists who became professional painters during the 1870s, studied in Paris at Academié Julian, which also allowed women to educate themselves, and spent several periods in France learning more about their profession. Nowadays, the much more famous and internationally well-known Helene Schjerfbeck was among these women as well, and she was a close friend with Maria Wiik. They shared an atelier in Helsinki, in Paris and in Bretagne, where they lived longer periods. From early on, Wiik was interested in painting portraits, and during the 1880s, she developed this skill by painting, for example, her sister Hilda Wiik, as well as flowers, children, peasantry and scenes. She received many orders, and in 1888–1889 she devoted all her working hours to painting portraits. In 1888, when Wiik worked on the portrait of Minna Lindroos, she also painted several other portraits,

²¹ Katerma 1954, 82.

mostly of men, such as writer and professor Zacharias Topelius. Minna Lindroos' painting is among the few done of female professionals. Wiik also painted several self-portraits, and was clearly interested in depicting people and studying the human face and character.²² Both Wiik and Lindroos could be seen as exceptional women figures in their historical context, since they both chose to carry on a professional life.

This portrait lets us see the teacher and school director Minna Lindroos separate from her roles as mother or wife. Although the painting was painted as an official portrait and it was ordered by the school, one could continue to analyse portrait painting as a biographical process or narrative. Jens Brockmeier has referred to the meaning of portraiture by saying that the art of portraiture has been the art of understanding life since the Renaissance: 'modern portraiture (and self-portraiture in particular) has been, from its beginning, a most sophisticated genre of life-writing.'²³ This is a fascinating thought when thinking of the process of painting, especially in this case, when one of the first woman portrait painters in Finland paints another pioneering woman. Simultaneously, we must remember that the process of painting is tied to the various conventions and practices of making art, and these conventions are culturally and historically constructed.²⁴ British life-writing scholar Maria Tamboukou points out how 'the painting of a portrait can be seen as a relational narrative par excellence'. She continues referring to Brockmeier:

Pictures and words, imagery and narrativity are interwoven in one and the same semiotic fabric of meaning. They are overlapping trajectories within the same symbolic space, a space of meaning in which our experience takes place and in which we try to make sense of the world.²⁵

In her own research, Tamboukou has studied the relationship between American artist Anna Klumpke and French painter Rosa Bonheur, and

²² On Wiik see Katerma 1954 and Konttinen 2000.

²³ Brockmeier 2001, 255 cited in Tamboukou 2010a, 175.

²⁴ Palin 2004.

²⁵ Tamboukou 2010a, 175.

particularly Klumpke's biography on Bonheur. Anna Klumpke had an intensive love relationship with Rosa Bonheur, who wanted Klumpke to both paint her portrait and write her biography. In Klumpke's process of writing about and painting another woman artist, one can interpret her work in the frame of autobiography and biography, as Tamboukou does.²⁶ Thus, the situation is very different from the situation where Maria Wiik paints an official portrait on the former girl school director, whom she probably did not even know very well.

However, the painting does seem to offer yet another viewpoint of Minna Krohn and her character. For a researcher who is searching for different representations of Minna Krohn, this portrait does let us see a very different kind of Minna Krohn, quite the opposite of the mentally unbalanced, depressed and lonely figure present in the writings of her daughters. This portrait enables us to see Minna Krohn, or more precisely Minna Lindroos, separate from the roles of mother or wife, as an individual in her own profession. With a sensitive contextualization, Wiik's portrait could be used as one source for constituting the biography of Minna Krohn, and analysed as a biographical process or narrative.

The unresolved Minna Krohn and the possibility of a dialogical biography

In this book, one of our aims has been to ponder the ethical issues related to biographical research and, particularly, the ethical issue related to the dialogue/relation between the narrator and narratee. For my research, this relationship has been the most intriguing and inspiring one. Doing biographical research is an emotional process. Swedish historian and biographer Eva-Helen Ulvros has said that biography is a genre that demands deep dwelling into other people's lives. It forces us to confront life's big questions: love, sorrow, death, troubles, tragedies. Like Ulvros

²⁶ Tamboukou 2010a and 2010b.

has said, it is hard not to be moved by all this.²⁷ And here, we always use our own life experience as well, whether we recognise it or not. Swedish historian Boel Englund sees dangers in getting too involved, however, or too close to your subjects.²⁸ Danish historian Birgitte Possing, a fellow writer in this book, points out the importance of taking distance when writing biographies, and sees this as a deeply ethical issue.²⁹ Although I agree that a biographer needs to take distance, or one could say that writing a biography means balancing between attachment and detachment, I approach this question from a somewhat different perspective. I want to point out the meaning of recognising and reflecting on your emotions during your research process, and of noticing how your relationship towards your subject changes and varies, as well as the writing about these reflections in your biographical research. While the changes are very much related to you as a researcher, they also relate to you as a private person. As in any other research, we always have a reason to write and study something. Like Rachel Morley puts it, writing a biography offers access not only 'into the private sphere of another individual but also into biographer's own mortal, personal being, whether acknowledged or otherwise, real or imagined'.³⁰

In the case of Minna Krohn, my involvement with her and her life-story is manifold. I began by studying her daughters and then became interested in the mother's impact on their lives. I have gradually shifted my gaze towards Minna Krohn herself, and the ways her life could be told. Yet, I am also deeply interested in hearing the voices of others, of those closest to her. After reading her own writings, I also have to

²⁷ Ulvros 2008, 456–457.

²⁸ Englund 2008, 228–233.

²⁹ Possing 2014, 75. See also Englund 2008, 228–233.

³⁰ Morley 2012, 79. Rachel Morley has inspiringly discussed on the emotional, affective and also bodily processes that happen when writing biographies. I agree with her, that biographers should reflect this issue much more and also write about it in their studies. Morley 2012. See also e.g. Leskelä-Kärki 2006, 78–85, 631–639, and 2014. Eila Hulda Halldórsdóttir comes to a rather similar conclusion, when she claims for the place for historian's emotions saying how the 'the danger of too much distance and coldness towards our subject(s) is that it leaves limited space for emotions (neither ours nor our subject's) or different perspectives.' Halldórsdóttir 2010, 215.

confess that there seems to be an obstacle, a shadow over her face – as a researcher, I don't feel I can gain access into her thoughts and opinions easily. This is due to her writing style and the ways she presents herself, and also to the limited amount of texts that she has, herself, produced. Her sporadic notions in her notebook are something completely different from, for example, Aino Kallas' lengthy, insightful and deeply self-reflexive diary writings from the early decades of the twentieth century. One must, of course, also consider the problem involved in writing a biography of a woman who spent almost twenty years of her life suffering from mental illness, mostly silent in her bed. All of this will generate huge challenges, also ethical, for this research, but also force me to view Minna Krohn through the representations brought forth by others.

Looking at the different kinds of images these various sources provide on Minna Krohn or Maria Lindroos, one must admit that it is not possible to write one, coherent life-story of Minna Krohn. Rather, these different images create a prism that illuminates her character and challenge us to create a new biography that emphasises differences and endeavours to describe lives from the perspective of contradictions. It is, thus, related to the notion of an identity that is vague and changing.

The case of Minna Krohn lets us see behind the history of the famous, of the canonised, and look for the histories of the forgotten, diminished or silenced ones.³¹ Minna Krohn is particularly interesting because of her conflicting identities and roles; she directed a girls' school for seven years and was among the first educated women in Finland, but is yet seen, particularly in Aino Kallas' eyes, as quite a failed figure. Opening up the different textual and visual representations of her alongside her own material, as well as letting the contradictions stay visible in the final result might be a way to make room for the unresolved figure of Minna Krohn.

³¹ Compare to the chapter in this book discussing the life of Sigríður Pálsdóttir by Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir.

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Coming together: Early Finnish medical women and the multiple levels of historical biography¹

Heini Hakosalo

Biographical research has often been characterised as a privileged means of analysing the interplay between individual choices on the one hand and non-individual "structures" on the other hand.² I will start by describing how I see this interaction and then move on to the main theme of my chapter, i.e. to distinguishing between three levels of biography and discussing the specific contribution of each of them to the biographical enterprise. These levels are *set biography* (prosopography), *group biography* and *individual biography*. I will also say a few words about *collective biography*, which is often – and in my view confusingly

¹ An earlier version of this article was published in Finnish as 'Tasohyppelyä. Varhaiset suomalaiset lääkärit naiset ja biografisen tutkimuksen monimuotoisuus' (Hakosalo 2014a).

² Scholars have conceptualised this key question using different terms. Daniel Bertaux speaks about 'the relationship between individual and collective praxis and socio-historical change', Bertaux 1981, 6; Jane Martin talks about the points of intersection between agency and social structures, Martin 2003, 219–232; while Lorraine Daston and Otto Sibum are interested in the way that the 'scientific persona' is formed at the intersection of 'cultural categories' and 'individual life courses', Daston and Sibum 2003, 2–3. See also Nasaw 2009, 576.