

IN MEMORIAM

ARVO KRIKMANN

21.07.1939 – 27.02.2017

The Estonian humanities have suffered a great loss. Arvo Krikmann, one of the most reputable Estonian folklorists of international renown, who dedicated his life to studying short forms of folklore, figurative speech, and humour, passed away after a serious illness on the early hours of February 27.

Arvo Krikmann was born into the family of a small farmer in Lääne-Viru County, Estonia, on July 21, 1939. In 1957 he finished Väike-Maarja Secondary School and continued his studies at the Faculty of History and Languages at the University of Tartu, where he studied Estonian language and literature, and graduated in 1962. His diploma thesis on folk humour was written on such a professional level that it deserved to be published.

In the years 1962–1969, Arvo Krikmann worked as researcher and senior researcher at the Department of Folklore of the Estonian Literary Museum. After his postgraduate studies at the Institute of Language and Literature of the Estonian Academy of Sciences in 1970–1972, he defended his thesis on the content and worldview of proverbs at the same institution. Beginning in 1973, he worked at the Institute of Language and Literature (since 1994 the Institute of the Estonian Language) as junior researcher, senior researcher at the sector of computational linguistics, and as senior researcher, leading researcher, and head of paremiology working group at the Department of Folkloristics. In 1998 he obtained his doctorate, defending his dissertation titled “Insights into short forms of folklore I: Fundamental concepts, genre relations, general problems”. In the years 2000–2014, Arvo Krikmann worked as senior researcher at the Estonian Literary Museum. In 1997 he was elected member of Estonian Academy of Sciences.

Arvo Krikmann was a remarkable scholar, whose highest scholarly merit consisted in introducing the Estonian folklore approach into the international arena. He authored or co-authored more than two hundred scholarly writings, focusing mainly on short forms of folklore, problems of geographical distribution of folklore, folk humour, theories of figurative speech and humour. His folklore studies were closely connected with the analysis of Estonian older literary language, figurative speech, and dialects. In the last decades Arvo Krikmann used cognitive and linguistic methods in the studies of folklore texts (incl. humour). His works were widely read and well known, and cited both in Estonia and abroad.



Academician Arvo Krikmann (co)compiled and edited several monumental publications, such as *Eesti vanasõnad* ('Estonian proverbs') (I–V; 1980–1988), *Eesti mõistatused* ('Estonian riddles') (I–II, 2001–2002; III:1, 2012; III:2, 2013). It was only recently that the readers saw the reprint of *Laustud sõna lagub: Valik eesti vanasõnu* ('Selection of Estonian proverbs'), compiled by Arvo Krikmann, the whole print run of which was destroyed in 1975.

With the beginning of the computer era in the 1990s, Arvo Krikmann became greatly enthused by the possibilities of information technology. The databases and e-publications compiled and edited by him are exceptional, as in most cases he was also the technical executor thereof. His colleagues remember well the maxim on the wall of his office at the Literary Museum, which read, "The lazy one creates a macro, the hard-working one clicks for a week". He compiled and supplemented folklore databases, and, exceptionally for a humanitarian, created computer programmes (the first ones as Word macros) to systematise and study his research material, thereby inspiring also his colleagues. He was one of the first analysts of internet folklore in Estonia.

Besides his research, Arvo Krikmann also acted as a highly valued university lecturer. In the years 1992–2005, as a professor extraordinarius, he could be encountered, wearing a denim jacket and carrying an imposingly high pile of lecture notes, hurrying through the corridors of the University of Tartu to give a lecture on the short forms of folklore and their source history, folk humour, semantics of sayings, or theory of figurative speech. Kriku's – this was how he was called by his colleagues, friends, and students – online lectures and materials were always exceptionally thorough and elaborate. He supervised a number of successfully defended master's and doctoral theses. His talent, knowledge, and dedication to his field have served as an irreplaceable example for the younger generation of folklorists.

Arvo Krikmann was a member of several Estonian and foreign research organisations, editorial boards, steering committees, and research councils. He was also a member of the Finnish Literature Society, Kalevala Society, Academia Scientiarum et Artium Europaea, the Estonian Mother Tongue Society, and the Academic Folklore Society, as well as honorary member of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, the International Association of Paremiology, and the Estonian Mother Tongue Society, and a member of the editorial board of the yearbook *Proverbium* published in the USA.

Arvo Krikmann's work was acknowledged with the 3rd Class Order of the White Star (1998), National Research Award (1999), research prize of the Baltic Assembly (2004), annual award of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia (2004), Finnish Kalevala Society Allhallows Prize (2013), and Paul Ariste medal of the Estonian Academy of Sciences (2014). In 2014 he also received Ferdinand Johann Wiedemann's language prize for studying short forms of Estonian folklore, introducing linguistic methods into folkloristics, studying humour both humorously and linguistically and linguistic-analytically, introducing Estonian verbal cultural heritage in the international arena, and promoting the humanities.

The secret of Arvo Krikmann's professional success lay in his extreme talent, diligence, and dedication, incited by his boyish interest and curiosity. His colleagues and disciples will remember him as an exceptionally brilliant scholar, a great personality with an unbelievably deep erudition.

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