

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.

Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum

NEWS IN BRIEF

MARGARET LYNGDOH DEFENDED A DISSERTATION ON KHASI VERNACULAR BELIEF WORLDS

Lyngdoh, Margaret. *Transformation, Tradition, and Lived Realities: Vernacular Belief Worlds of the Khasis of Northeastern India*. *Dissertationes Folkloristicae Universitatis Tartuensis* 23. Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2016. 168 pages.

On April 25th, 2016, Margaret Lyngdoh defended her dissertation titled *Transformation, Tradition, and Lived Realities: Vernacular Belief Worlds of the Khasis of Northeastern India* at the University of Tartu Institute of Cultural Research and Arts. Lyngdoh is the first folklore scholar from India who has received a doctoral degree in Estonia. She completed her six years of PhD studies at the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore under the supervision of Professor Ülo Valk.

The dissertation consists of four peer-reviewed articles on various manifestations of Khasi vernacular beliefs, which have been published, or accepted for publishing, in acknowledged scholarly journals (*Asian Ethnology*, *Internationales Asienforum*, and *Anthropos*) or by an internationally recognized publisher (Equinox). Lyngdoh's case studies are equipped with a thorough introduction, which provides the necessary contextual framework for Khasi ethnic and religious matters, including complicated relationships between Khasi Christianities and indigenous religions, as well as methodological and theoretical considerations to present central keywords of the dissertation. These include fieldwork context and concepts of the supernatural, genre, tradition, vernacular, and transformation, the latter being the most important keyword that penetrates all parts of the thesis.

The research articles published within Margaret Lyngdoh's thesis are based on fresh fieldwork data that has been documented by the author. Her field trips were carried out partly in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, India, but in most cases in various remote areas of Khasi and Jantia Hills, which are hard to access due to natural conditions and the lack of infrastructure. Through her long-term fieldwork Lyngdoh has created a bulky corpus of new empirical data on supernatural folklore, thus documenting traditions of Khasi sub-communities, many of which have not been studied earlier. This new set of data is compared in her studies with descriptions of earlier Khasi intellectuals as well as those of colonial writers, who laid the foundations for many stereotypes that contemporary Khasi scholars do contest. In addition to Western epistemological and ontological premises, Lyngdoh relies on Khasi vernacular epistemologies and ontologies while interpreting the documented fieldwork data, which help her understand and mediate the complicated manifestations of the supernatural in Khasi communities, and thus also promote vernacular theorising.

Throughout her dissertation Margaret Lyngdoh is questioning and problematising the earlier simplified, often Europe-centric, stereotyped, and homogenising views on Khasi communities, their folklore, and indigenous religion. The author's critical observations concern both macro-level assessments to create a homogenous Khasi identity for political



or economical reasons, and micro-level statements on details from the perspective of an insider or the one who is close to the indigenous communities. In her thesis Lyngdoh clearly demonstrates great empathy, her sincere wish to understand the community members under scrutiny, and not to judge (or condemn) them for their supernatural traditions.

Margaret Lyngdoh's work is remarkable also because of the fact that the author concentrates on complicated topics labelled in the Introduction as "expressions of dark folklore" (p. 9). This also emphasises the significance of the author's documentation practices to record vernacular manifestations that are often kept in secret, which imply wild environment, dangerous situations, and unpredictable consequences. Moreover, scholarly interpretation of this kind of folkloric material is undeniably complicated. In many cases neither earlier studies on particular topics nor any employable examples from other traditions or regions are available. In addition, it may be said that local vernacular ontologies are often not well 'translatable' or 'adjustable' to Western ontologies, which may cause problems in explaining vernacular manifestations of the supernatural to the scholarly audience. In this respect Margaret Lyngdoh has done extraordinary work in sharing new data and posing novel questions; in some cases no clear answers have been provided, but I have to admit that this is often a better solution than forcible imposition of inappropriate interpretations. This way there is enough space for further interpretations and 'excavations' in Khasi vernacular knowledge.

I would like to stress that Margaret Lyngdoh's dissertation concerns topical problems in contemporary Khasi society such as stigmatisation and 'othering' of minority groups (both ethnic and religious minorities), mob fury addressed to those members of the community who are 'different', violence against women, etc. Lyngdoh's work thus exemplifies the idea (articulated also in the introductory article on p. 59) that, in addition to the function of folklore to unite and create a common identity, it may also serve to divide, to create distance and 'other' certain social groups. In this connection, however, the author mentions the possibility to 'undo' stereotypes of malicious folklore through folkloristic studies, as well as folklorists' prospect to "explain the mechanisms of folklore in generating fear, conflicts, and stigmatisation" (p. 59) also to the local communities and their leaders.

Ergo-Hart Västrik