

Narrative Researcher Pille Kippar 90

On 24 October Pille Kippar's 90th birthday was celebrated with a festive seminar at the Estonian Language Institute.

The last few years have directed our attention to the history of folklore as an area of specialisation, as well as to those who have helped define it and make its existence visible amidst other philological disciplines. Recently we gained an overview of this great work with the help of recollections on the life-work of Jawaharlal Handoo.

This year Pille Kippar, the first Estonian woman to hold a PhD in folklore, celebrates her 90th birthday. She is among those who have made great contributions to the study of folklore, who have helped expand its thematics and solidified its authority as a field. She is known to us as a classic researcher in the field of folktales, who has always also found a way to pursue her own path, bringing innovative approaches to the treatment of traditional forms. For example, her international catalogue of Estonian animal fairy tales, published in the distinguished Folklore Fellows series in Helsinki (*Estnische Tiermärchen. Typen- und Variantenverzeichnis*. (FF Communications 237, 1986.) also contains recent animal stories, which have a certain formulaic nature. The same is true of a new story collection on Clever Ants and Vanapagan, characters to whom writers and others discussing national narratives have attributed an extraordinary role, but who (particularly Vanapagan) have meanings that transcend time. Pille has transmitted Finno-Ugric fairy tales to the Estonian reader and graciously collaborated, for example, in the creation of the first large, original German-language web anthology, designed by Kärt Summatavet.

Pille Kippar has helped make visible various new types of folklore: wall newspapers and almanacs, which she helped legalise and introduce at the beginning of the 1990s as an aspect of contemporary folk creativity. These were missing from the Estonian canon in the field, though they were represented in Finland, used in many Estonian schools and diaspora communities and remain in active use to the present day. She began collecting narratives and information from



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Russian-speaking university students, beginning with folk stories about their origins and genealogies which are located at the borderline between written and oral stories. By their nature these are an important component of values and a sense of belonging. Pille has emphasised the importance of telling personal stories and the relation between such narration and folklore connected with professions and professional life.

All of this has been supported by Pille's field work and related experimentation. Her activities as a university teacher were propelled by the passion of sharing knowledge but also by the need to gather finances to purchase an apartment (when the tiny income from research work, at the lowest possible remuneration, was insufficient). Significantly, her teaching has borne lasting fruit; she began teaching a folklore course at the Pedagogical Institute in 1964 and continued it for almost thirty years until the Institute became the Pedagogical University in 1993, thereafter serving as a professor and Estonian philology department chair for one term. Since 1998 she has been a professor emerita. She did not believe in lecturing as a sole teaching method, but made creative

use of individual and group work: at her oral examinations in folklore, singing was a requirement. Indeed, Pille's teaching has preserved knowledge about folklore in the long term and maintained its academic importance. However askance philological circles looked at the introduction of the opinions of simple people, these efforts have continued on till the present day due to the work of devoted researchers and shall live on for a long time hence. Not to mention Pille's radio broadcasts on storytelling, which have reached a broader circle of listeners. The Estonian Radio editor Silvia Karro recalls that Pille was always friendly, very well prepared, and knew how to speak in a simple and clear manner. She was also impressed that Pille was very adept at mimicking the sounds of animals and birds, and included them in her broadcasts.

Pille has been a member of ISFNR since 1984, SIEF since 1989 and the Kalevalaseura since 1993. From 1990–1995 she was folklore sector chair in the Mother Tongue Society (Emakeele Selts) and in 1996–1997 a member of the board of the Academic Folklore Society. Pille has written and given many papers on the Baltic–Finnic region as a contact zone between east and west, which is reflected in folklore and the distribution of folk narratives. Her PhD dissertation, defended in 1991, still awaits publication in Estonian. May she have much energy to continue her ongoing efforts to develop her ideas and knowledge in a theoretical direction and towards textbooks and study materials!

Colleagues