



## Aarne Kinnunen

\* 4.2.1930 † 18.4.2022

Professor Emeritus of Aesthetics Aarne Kinnunen died in Helsinki on 18 April 2022. He was 92 years old, born in Lieksa on 4 February 1930. He was invited as a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1987.

Kinnunen matriculated from the Savonlinna Lyceum in 1949. He earned his bachelor's degree in 1952, licentiate in 1960 and PhD in 1967 from the University of Helsinki.

Kinnunen originally qualified as a psychologist and, prior to his academic career, he worked as a vocational guidance counsellor in Tampere and in Helsinki. His long university career began in 1963 as Assistant in Comparative Literature and Aesthetics and continued as Assistant Professor and acting Professor until 1986. Kinnunen was offered a personal additional professorship in aesthetics in 1986, and he remained in this position until his retirement in 1994.

In the course of his career, Kinnunen published around twenty monographs in aesthetics, literature and drama, in addition to numerous articles and co-authored works. Over the decades, he also wrote reviews on literature and literary research.

Kinnunen played a key role in the new rise of Finnish aesthetics which started in

the late 1960s. His 1969 work, *Esteettisestä elämyksestä* ("On aesthetic experience"), introduced new ideas from Anglo-American aesthetics into Finnish research. Kinnunen presents credible arguments against all attempts to define the aesthetic experience, and his concluding position is inspired by the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein whereby the categorization of experience depends essentially on the context from which the experiencer is speaking. According to Kinnunen, the basic situation is that the experiencer themselves defines their experience as aesthetic, and not religious, for instance.

Kinnunen was one of the founders of the Finnish Society for Aesthetics in early 1972 and served as the long-standing chairman of the society. He and his colleagues would organize extremely popular public lecture series as part of the society's activities. One worth mentioning is the series on environmental aesthetics, among the first of its kind globally in this field of research. The book *Ympäristöestetiikka* ("Environmental aesthetics", 1981) was published on the basis of these lectures. This could be considered the start of the strong research tradition of environmental aesthetics in Finland.

Kinnunen's own article in this collection was an important introduction to aesthetic questions concerning the natural environment in Finnish research. *Luonnonestetiikka* ("The aesthetics of nature") provides an enlightening account of fundamental questions that had not yet received much attention in the study of aesthetics. Kinnunen highlights several differences between the aesthetic appreciation of works of art and natural sites. According to him, one of the key differences is that natural sites are not reviewed critically like works of art; the aesthetic appreciation of nature is "positive". The expression "positive aesthetics" has remained in use in research in the field, even though the view is not widely accepted in any way.

An extensive work on some of the fundamental questions in aesthetics, entitled simply *Estetiikka* ("Aesthetics"), was published in 2000. In this book, Kinnunen distanced himself in many ways from conventional academic research in aesthetics. Even his definition of what aesthetics studies differs from the mainstream definition and generally accepted notions in the field. Kinnunen actually separates aesthetics from the philosophy of art, and the work does not address questions that fall under the field of philosophical aesthetics at all, such as the problem of defining art. The book also characteristically contains an abundance of quotes from fictional works, whereas references to the latest research in aesthetics are sparse.

Overall, the rich use of examples is a key feature of Kinnunen's research on philosophical aesthetics. While this makes his style original and recognizable, especially his later works are also somewhat less accessible.

As a researcher of literature and drama, Kinnunen's interests lay in Finnish literary classics. His doctoral thesis on the plays of Aleksis Kivi was followed by works on drama and theatre, *Mitä näyttelijä tekee* ("What an actor does", 1984) and *Draaman maailma* ("The world of drama", 1985). In terms of prose writers, Kinnunen was particularly intrigued by Kivi, Lehtonen, Haanpää, Hyry and Haavikko, about whom he wrote several works. *Tuli, aurinko ja Seitsemän veljestä* ("Fire, sun and Seven Brothers", 1973) and *Seitsemän veljestä ja lukemisen juonet* ("Seven Brothers and reading plots", 2002) are cornerstones of modern Kivi research.

His works on drama, prose and poetry, published at different points in his career, demonstrate Kinnunen's ability to navigate different research traditions with ease. His researcher portfolio showcases his wide knowledge of both Finnish and world literature. His distinctive manner of expression, combining apt remarks, humour and deep insight, makes reading his research a pleasure. This style is nowhere more delightful than in works such as *Talo ilmassa* ("The house in the air", 2011), written about *Putkinotko* by Joel Lehtonen. His last works, including *Horror vacui: Antti Hyryn proosasta, lyyrisestä ja dramaattisesta* ("Horror vacui: On Antti Hyry's prose, lyrical and dramatic", 2015) and *Korskea monisielu: Suppea ensyklopedia Paavo Haavikon lyriikkaan* ("Haughty man of many souls: a brief encyclopaedia on the poetry of Paavo Haavikko", 2018) strayed even further from the conventional forms of research, gravitating towards the literary and philosophical essay.

As a lecturer of basic courses, Kinnunen was perceived by his large groups of students as a somewhat reserved and intimidating character due to his expressionless,

short-spoken manner of teaching. During seminars, the seemingly sullen professor would reveal himself to be a convivial, friendly teacher with a good sense of humour who would encourage and support his students. Kinnunen emphasized the essentials of good research to his students: good writing skills, originality, and the ability to recognize fruitful problems.

Kinnunen's teaching method of choice was having discussions. Once during a seminar session, the students asked Kinnunen jokingly why he included only a handful of literary references in his books. The professor answered the question in his quintessential manner: I take my lead from Aristotle's *Poetics* – not a single source reference. Upon Kinnunen's retirement, instead of giving a speech at the farewell dinner, one of his PhD holders asked him a question: does a practitioner of normal science need to be familiar with the philosophy of science? The answer came immediately: no, they do not, they have already grasped it.

Kinnunen supervised and educated an exceptional group of researchers and specialists who went on to become university researchers and professors and work in var-

ious roles in theatre, arts management and media. Over the decades, his academic teaching and literary connections formed a large circle of friends who remained close for decades. Kinnunen's home in Kruunuhaka was open to his students and colleagues and friendships born through his spouse Aino-Maija. Aarne would also remind people that he was a countryman at heart, having grown up on a farm. With the exception of his last two summers, he would spend the summer months at his cottage in Ihamaniemi, a place that was also frequented by his friends and colleagues.

At the launch event of his last book, on the poetry of Haavikko, Aarne went against his habit and gave a speech, naturally keeping it short, and said that the joys of his old age included Bach's music and a glass of wine every night, on doctor's orders. Up until his final days, he would examine the state of research and the university frankly and critically during phone conversations.

Aarne is missed by his daughters Helka-Maria and Saara, his son Petteri, his grandchildren Iida and Eetu and a large group of friends.

*Arto Haapala and Jyrki Nummi*