

Speech of thanks by Eeva Tapio

Mister Chairman, distinguished Honorary Member Olli Lehto, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the new honorary members, I have the privilege and pleasure of thanking the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters for the distinction bestowed upon us today. I would not be doing justice to my colleagues here if I were to say that we do not deserve such an honour; we are each of us living our own lives and it is this that is being assessed.

We are this year celebrating the 90th anniversary of Finnish independence, and we remember with gratitude all those who earned this for us and were instrumental in preserving it. We have built this country up together, each in our own way, and not least the far-sighted scholars who founded the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters exactly a hundred years ago. We realise very well that knowledge and science know no language boundaries, but it is equally clear that all languages have their rights, even in the fields of science and culture. In that sense the equal rights of the Finnish language alongside Swedish could by no means be taken for granted in the intellectual climate of a hundred years ago. The number of Finnish-speaking male students exceeded the number of Swedish-speakers for the first time in 1887, by a margin of 146 to 140, and the number of Finnish female students

did the same in 1902, by 82 to 76. Nowadays more than half of the students are women.

Two of the four new honorary members are women, Professor Anna-Leena Siikala and myself, and it has been said that we are the first female honorary members that the Academy has ever had. I hope, therefore, that you will permit me to mention a few numbers and dates to illustrate the part played by women in the history of science and learning in Finland.

The first female student to matriculate was Maria Tschetschulin in 1870, and the first to graduate with a master's degree was Irene Åström in 1882. The first woman to complete a doctorate was Irene Eskelin, who presented her thesis in medicine in 1896, to be followed three days later by Tekla Hultin, for a doctorate in philosophy. A few more details may be in order regarding the latter.

Although Tekla Hultin, a student colleague of my grandmother's, wrote her doctoral thesis in history in Finnish, the public defence of it took place in Swedish. When the official opponent, Docent Kustavi Grotenfelt, mentioned after the discussion that it could just as well have taken place in Finnish, he was sharply reprimanded by Professor Fridolf Gustavsson in the meeting of the Section of the Humanities for his "pro-Finnish enthusiasm", as "Swedish was a more suitable language from a purely academic point of view".

(I cannot resist mentioning in parentheses that my grandmother, Eva Hällström-Moltesen, who became Finland's sixth female master of philosophy, lived during her student days at the home of her uncle, Professor Gustaf Gabriel Hällström, on the corner of Hallituskatu and Fabianinkatu, on the site now occupied by the Porthania building, where I studied plant pathology, my main subject, in the 1940s.)

Finland's first female professor was Alma Söderhjelm, who was appointed to the chair in general history at Åbo Akademi in 1927, and the first to be appointed in the University of Helsinki was Laimi Leidenius, in medicine, in 1930. By 2007 there were 2289 professors in Finland, of whom 538, or 23.5%, were women, which still cannot be regarded as a satisfactory figure in relation to the proportion of women students. It is now quite clear, however, that it is only a matter of qualifications and not of gender.

The first female member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters was the archaeology professor Eila Kivikoski, elected in 1949, no less than 41 years after the Academy was founded, and altogether there have been 96 women members during the 100 years of its existence, of whom 82 are current members, making up 13.7% of the total membership. It should perhaps also be noted that 51 of these have been invited to membership within the present decade.

Since my colleagues who have been made honorary members on his occasion have been introduced comprehensively by others, I will confine myself to the personal connections that I have with them.

I have learned of Mr. Jarmo Visakorpi's substantial achievements in medicine and university administration from various academic directories. Hospital environments are familiar to me from my

childhood and youth, in the form of Sortavala General Hospital and Vyborg Provincial Hospital, and I also worked in an emergency hospital during the war, but I actually made the acquaintance of Mr. Visakorpi during his time as Academy chairman, when I was a fairly regular attender at the interesting and informative monthly meetings that he chaired so pleasantly and efficiently.

Mrs Anna-Leena Siikala's field of study as a folklorist is closer to my interests, as my grandfather, Oskar Relander, wrote his doctoral thesis in 1894 on "Metaphorical language in Finnish lyrical folk poetry". Later he was deported to Siberia in 1916 for his defence of Finnish as a language of instruction, in other words opposition to the Russification of the teachers' seminary in Sortavala, of which he was the principal. He was able to return during the unrest that attended the Russian Revolution the following year.

Mr. Paavo Seppänen I know mainly through his late brother, Professor Esko Seppänen, who was a colleague of mine at the Agricultural Research Centre in the 1960s and 1970s. I made the acquaintance of Paavo at his brother's funeral.

Finally I should not fail to note how privileged we who work or have worked in the field of science and learning are, in that we have, or have had, the opportunity to spend our time on things that inspire us, making use of previously established knowledge, solving problems and creating new knowledge. I found teaching and the forging of good contacts with students especially rewarding, but research work similarly means the opening up of contacts with colleagues in other countries, and that can also widen one's perspectives. We have had excellent working lives, and for that we can be grateful – and now to cap it all, honorary membership of the Academy of Science and Letters! Very many thanks to you all!