

On Roles of Women in Finnish Culture and Arts (1850s—1940s)

Lecture, UniWien, 9.4.2024 6—8 pm
Abteilung Finno-Ugristik, Hörsaal 1
Spitalgasse 2-4 Hof 7, 1090 Wien

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This March was the 180th anniversary of birth of great Finnish writer and playwright, Minna Canth. She was the first woman who has been honoured by Finland with a flag day since 2007. That is the day of social equality.

What is the meaning of social equality today? What fights have been led to the recent situation on field of women's rights in Finland?

The success of Finland as a country is to a great extent linked with improvements in the status of women and gender equality. Finland has a good track record in gender equality. The Global Gender Gap Report 2022 ranks Finland at number two worldwide. Finland is a country where women usually work full-time and enjoy equal access to education and healthcare. It is also where women are most likely to be able to participate fully in the country's political and economic life. As provided for in the Constitution the Finnish society is committed to gender equality. Areas for improvement include the gender pay gap and the lack of women in top corporate positions.

Minna Canth (19th March 1844—12th May 1897) was an author, and journalist, fighter for human and women's rights in her works before these concepts would have been used in other parts of the world.

“Canth stood out when there was public debate about women's rights. In 1885 a bishop had argued that God's order required that women were not emancipated. The Swedish writer Gustaf af Geijerstam then argued that men could only aspire to one day have the purity of women because they were fundamentally different and this was the reason for prostitution and other immorality. Canth objected strongly to this argument as it meant that men could defend their poor morals by reference to their implicit shortcomings, whereas any women involved in prostitution would lack the same defence.”

We follow the path of women's rights after the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Finland was the first country in the world to extend the right to vote and stand for elections to all women and men in 1906. Finland was also the first country to elect women to Parliament in 1907. Already in 1917, a number of Finnish women were given four weeks of maternity leave...

We get familiar with historical milestones, laws and acts in according to women's rights, supportive activities, and equality issues in past and recent days. Is every issue solved? Are there (new) questions and problems in the 21st century?

On other hand we will see other female authors and artists throughout the Finnish culture history who was (and are) effecting on wide audience and on the different stylistic eras and movements. (From Fredrika Runeberg, Ida Aalberg, Aino Kallas, Maria Jotuni, Hella Wuolijoki, Aino Ackté, Helene Schjerfbeck, Edith Södergran until Tove Jansson, Eeva Kilpi, Leena Krohn, Rosa Lixsom, Värttinä, Sofi Oksanen, Pirkko Saisio, Alma Pöysti, Kaija Saariaho...)

Lecturer Ms. Ildikó Sirató Ph.D. literature and theatre researcher. Associate professor at Hungarian Dance University, senior researcher in Hungarian National Library, lecturer at different Universities in Hungary, and abroad. Theatrical activities as stage director and dramaturg. Research fields: comparative theatre research, dramaturgy, musical theatre, history of national type of theatres in Europe, Hungarian, Finnish, and Estonian literature, cultural connections. Author of books: A Concise History of Hungarian Theatre, 2017, 2024; Galeria.hu, 2018; National Theatres in Europe. Institution of National Theatres, Comparative Studies on Theatre History, 2007; Theatre in the Northern Light. Estonian and Finnish Drama on the Hungarian Stage, 2005.

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