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PROFESSOR WOJCIECH SKALMOWSKI

Wojciech Skalmowski was born on the 24th of June 1933 in Poznań. Both his parents were physicians, who in 1939 – like the majority of Polish inhabitants – were expelled by the Germans from Poznań. The family found refuge at Sędziszów, where the future linguist began his education, and started to learn German, English and Russian among other subjects. After returning to Poznań in 1945, he continued his education at Marcinkowski Grammar School, where he took an interest in various alphabets and languages (mainly Sanskrit). In 1951 he began Oriental studies at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, learning Arabic and Turkish and specializing in Iranian philology. He wrote his MA thesis under Professor Jerzy Kuryłowicz, the subject being the investigation of Modern Persian etymology. In 1956 he was granted a scholarship at Humboldt University in



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Berlin, where he continued Iranian studies under the guidance of Professor H.F.J. Junker. His studies culminated in his doctoral dissertation *Über einige statistisch erfassbare Züge der persischen Sprachentwicklung* (“Folia Orientalia” 1962, IV, 47–80).

At that time he reviewed new publications devoted to mathematical linguistics (and presented his own conception: *Probleme der Gesetzmässigkeit in der mathematischen Linguistik* (“Biuletyn PTJ” 1965, XXIII, 23–33); *Grammaire générative et linguistique générale* („Biuletyn Fonograficzny” 1969, X, 109–113); *Problem of tense in generative grammar* (“ITL – Review for Applied Linguistics” 1969, III, 26–38). At the same time he was active in the field of Iranian linguistics, where he concentrated his efforts on the Middle Iranian epoch, mainly on the Parthian language: *Das Nomen im Parthischen* (“Biuletyn PTJ” 1967, XXV, 75–89). As the subject of his *Habilitationschrift* he chose a topic from the interface of typology and historical syntax of the Iranian languages, that is the problem of the ergative construction, which is already visible in Old Persian but is consequently developed in the

Afghan (Pashto) languages. He devoted a paper to this problem *The «ergative construction» in Pashto* (“Folia Orientalia” 1968, IX, 99–129); shortened Polish version: *Uwagi o ergatiwie* (“Prace Językoznawcze” WSP w Krakowie 1976, III, 65–71).

At the beginning of 1968 he was granted a scholarship in Tehran. In response to political events in Poland in the March of 1968, he left Iran for Belgium and requested political asylum. In autumn 1968 he began teaching the Polish language and conducting classes in Iranian linguistics at Katolieke Universiteit at Leuven. In 1969 he was invited for a year by Professor R.N. Frye as a visiting lecturer to give lectures on Iranian linguistics at Harvard University. In the United States he met his future wife, Barbara Plater.

In 1970 the couple settled in Belgium, and Wojciech Skalmowski returned to his previous position as an associate professor at the university in Leuven. In 1977 he became a full professor in the Department of Eastern and Slavic Studies. Professor Skalmowski organized two prestigious symposia on Middle Iranian Linguistics (1984 and 1993). He took part in many international conferences in Europe, America and Asia, presenting significant contributions: *Transitive verb constructions in the Pamir and Dardic languages* (Études indo-européennes [in honorem J. Safarewicz], Kraków 1974: 205–212); *The linguistic importance of the Dardic languages* “Journal of Central Asia”, Islamabad, 1985, VIII/1, 5–11); *Elamite and Akkadian translations of the Old Persian periphrastic perfect* (“Folia Orientalia” 1976, XVII, 217–229); *Dative counterparts in Pashto* (The Dative 1: Descriptive Studies, Amsterdam–Philadelphia 1996: 395–407); *Iranian heterography and Aramaic: some reflections* (“Irano-Judaica”, Jerusalem, 1999, IV, 151–158).

He proposed a whole series of Iranian etymologies, of a both partly linguistic and partly philological nature. His research led to establishment not only of the original phonetic and semantic structure of the word in question, but also explained its later applications in the concrete (con)texts of a given language. Explaining the etymology of the Indo-Iranian **arya-* (*Le terme a(i)rya- eniranien*, “Journal of Turkish Studies” 1993, XVII, 171–172) he had derived the word in question from IE. **h₂-r₁-io-*, lit. ‘un-moving, im-mobile’ (from a linguistic point of view) and proposed to see in its use as a (supposedly) ethnic name a reference to an ‘unmoving’ population, i.e., to the well-established conquerors/settlers (from a philological point of view). But the notion of ‘immobility’ underlying this word must have referred to its metaphorical sense and that the term in fact means ‘stability of allegiance’, i. e., ‘fidelity/faithfulness’ (especially in religious domain). Moreover, the original meaning of the term **arya-* is important for a number of issues in the Iranian Studies. For instance, in the light of this etymology the name ‘Iran’ (<**a₁ryānām xšaθra-*) must have originally meant ‘the realm of the faithful (Mazdaeans)’, a description exactly replicated later by the Arabic term *dār^u-l-mu[’]minīn* for the Islamic countries. Consequently, the still current idea that *arya-* represents an ethnic (or even ‘racial’) name may finally be discarded. Other etymologies represent attempts at addressing broader issues (such as a clarification of certain Avestan theological terms) or proposing a reconsideration of some well-entrenched ideas, also on Indo-European background, e.g. *Gr: παρθένος = aw. para-data-?* (*Collectanea linguistica in honorem A. Heinz*, Kraków 1986: 133–135); *A note on Greek ἄνθρωπος* (“Studia Etymologica Cracoviensia” 1998, III, 103–106); *OCS imę: questions of etymology* (“Slavica Gandensia” 1992, XIX, 69–74).

His most extensive contribution to Iranian was published in Polish as two chapters in *Old*

Church Slavonic Języki indoeuropejskie / Indo-European languages (Warszawa, I, 1986): *Języki nowoirañskie / New Iranian Languages*: 161–215; and *Języki dardyjskie / Dardic languages*: 217–244.

He also wrote a shortened version of his textological hypothesis: *Wheel within Wheel: Remarks on Bundahišn* in Polish (“Middle Iranian Studies – Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta” 1984, XVI, 269–311) as «*Sobowtór*» i «*zwierciadło*»: *hipoteza dwuznaczności pewnych tekstów* (“ZNUJ, Prace Historycznoliterackie” 1991, LXXIX, 88–93). The starting-point was an interpretation of a Middle Iranian genesis treatise *Bundahishn*, which presents the myth of world history – macrocosmos on certain references and legends of Avesta, which in Skalmowski’s opinion is based on the projection of the human body – microcosmos (mountains – bones, rivers – veins, seas and lakes – different human organs). Human history resembles the infiltration of nourishment in the digestive system. The consequence of this standpoint is the treatment of Avesta as a text created with a pedagogical intention for spreading a unified language in Median state, in which the magi played an important role in education. In his opinion, the narrator is language (de Saussurean *la langue*) itself, which appeals through the text (*la parole*) to the recipient, inciting him to the understanding / interpretation of a hidden meaning. Linguistic symbols (nouns, pronouns, verbs) invite the recipient to deal with them, and not with their objective correlatives. This has a certain parallel in Old Indian grammatical treatises and may be dated back to the Proto-Iranian and even Proto-Indo-European linguistic reflexion created by priests-sages (a thought suggested in a letter, 1996). He applied a similar interpretation of hidden meaning (I – double of the text, Thou – mirror of the recipient) to the Persian ghazals of Rumi and Hāfez, suggesting a similar approach to Shakespeare’s sonnets and William Blake’s metaphysical visions.

As the only expert in Polish and Russian literature at Leuven University, he conducted classes (lectures, seminars) in the Slavic Department. He also wrote reviews for the well-known Flemish “Standard der Letteren” (Brussels), an important literary and political publications concerning Eastern Europe and totalitarian systems. He took a special interest in George Orwell, who in his “Nineteen Eighty-Four” introduced the term *newspeak*. In his essay *Totalitarny język komunizmu* (“Kultura” 1979, December, 91–99) he pointed out, among others its persuasive function (before seizing power) and a distortive function (after gaining it). After many years, he pertinently demonstrated its peculiar continuation in the language of post-modernism: *Literary deconstruction as „Newspeak”* (The Postmodern Challenges: Perspective East and West, “Postmodern Studies”, Amsterdam/Atlanta, 1999, 27, 85–95), which treated reality as a social ad linguistic construct. J. Derrida’s *deconstructionism* belongs here, since for him the world picture was merely a mental construct, and reality a text. The stylistic vagueness and idiomatic character lead to rhetorical aggression and political correctness, that is to manipulation as is the case of *newspeak*.

Essays published by Professor Skalmowski (under the pen-name M. Broński) in the columns of “Kultura” mainly devoted to Polish (Mickiewicz, Norwid, Witkiewicz [Witkacy], Gombrowicz, Iwaszkiewicz, Przyboś, Parandowski, Kisielewski) and foreign (Orwell, Koestler, Nabokov, Rushdi, Naipaul) writers were collected in two volumes: *Teksty i preteksty* (Paris 1981) and *Lektury dla “Kultury”* (Lublin 2004).

Professor Skalmowski retired in 1998, and in 2003, at the age of 70, his friends and students from Leuven University celebrated his jubilee with two *Festschriften*: *Iranica Se-*

lecta (“Silk Road Studies”, VIII) and *For East is East* (“Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta”, 126) with a complete bibliography of his works. In 2004 the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Jagellonian University published his *Studies in Iranian linguistics and philology* – a comprehensive selection of papers divided into three groups of problems: I. Grammar, II. Interpretations, III. Etymology.

In 2007 Wydawnictwo Literackie in Kraków published voluminous correspondence: *Mrożek – Skalmowski. Listy 1970–2003*, which was met with much acclaim in Polish literary reviews. Jerzy Giedroyc intended to publish his own correspondence with Skalmowski (*circa* 500 letters) which were transferred to Archiwum Emigracji UMK in Toruń. In the spring of 2008 Channel 2 of the Polish radio broadcasted a long interview with Wojciech Skalmowski. He was already seriously ill, but still possessed a sense of humor and was unpretentious and in good spirits.

He died on the 18th of July 2008 in Brussels and his ashes were buried in Wrocław on the 15th of November of the same year.

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