

JULIAN KRZYŻANOWSKI

(1892—1976)

Death of a scholar, particularly of a great scholar, is a loss made heavier for the fact that the man who is leaving was intimate to many on whom he had bestowed his great gift of thought and heart, whom he inspired in their research work; a creative mind impossible to be replaced. The death of prof. Julian Krzyżanowski, an eminent philologist and past master of Polish literature of all its periods, a great folklorist known not only in Poland and Slavonic countries but also in England and the United States where he had his popular Polish studies lectures, was such a loss.

Julian Krzyżanowski was not only a great scholar but a great personality, a man of unusual activity, participating in almost all important scholarly meetings in the last 50 years, a writer, a teacher, an editor, a polemicist, a critic.

Although Julian Krzyżanowski did not often appear on scientific meetings in the last years (he did not miss really important ones) it is nevertheless difficult to accept in one's consciousness that „Professor is” should be changed into the past tense. Perhaps because he was one of those few who influenced the development of 20th century Polish studies and nearby branches of knowledge. Perhaps for the fact that he had a very suggestive or one should say „transparent” personality of a man and a scholar—one personality deprived of the filters between a thought and its expression, not steered by those whom he addressed.

He expressed his opinions as lucidly as possible and always objectively, with friendliness of a master but at the same time without indulgence. Was he never mistaken? Certainly he could be but he was the only Polish scholar whose erudition comprised the amount of knowledge impossible to comprise at present, who had still seen the whole history of Polish literature in comparison with other literatures and with folklore, who had led professional arguments with linguists, formulated his understanding of literature in theoretical sketches. In practice it meant that if he expressed his opinion about a monography devoted to one writer or one problem the author of the monography had to work carefully on his critical remarks in order to make certain what he could defend. Such is the fate of authors in today's world of specialization. One may know everything about one's own subject of research and at the same time not to known important points of reference to rich cultural tradition, noticeable from the level of knowledge gained by Julian Krzyżanowski. Not many professors are willing to practice this form of expression, although it would be natural to expect that masters and not budding scholars should undertake scientific criticism. He wrote many reviews, expressed his opinions about new publications, typescripts for publishers, PhD and qualifying for assistant-professorship and professorship theses. His lack of indulgence did not discourage authors from wanting his reviews. Perhaps the very signature of Julian Krzyżanowski guaranteed that the opinion was independent of the environmental preferences; one had to expect remarks formulated with sardonic flair—Professor overlooked nothing but with objectivity and moderation showed the value of the work. He was personally affected by these readings, talked about them in private and in the public (then so-

metimes concealed the name of the author and the audience tried to decipher it). He was really happy being able to find out a really valuable work, or to see the author's ability to correct his own mistakes. Here, I think, his personality revealed itself. He did not belong to the epoch which separated work from leisure. Emotions now divided between passions and hobbies, identified with our leisure and contrasted with work, were richly developed in his life and focused on the only passion and meaning of his life-Polish studies. It is not solely knowledge and competence. Julian Krzyżanowski brought over to our times a noble atmosphere of the years when he, as a future scholar, prepared himself for the life in a society deprived of its own state. This tradition of independence constituted the source of this „unprofessional” treatment of this work: total devotion to the only passion of his life, a peculiar version of private patronage, the feeling of responsibility for somebody else's book, for unambitious thesis, for misleading information in a literary programme, for an unexplained history of one manuscript; and in the first place the courage of a scholar in reminding, where and when it was necessary, that scientific workers are conscious of their responsibility but at the same time of their rights to establish the direction of their research and its objective evaluation. It is enough to mention the argument about Renaissance during the preparation to a Renaissance Year in the first half of 1950s, and Professor's memorable speeches during both preparatory discussions and the congress in October 1953. His active participation in the transformations of humanities in those years was of extreme importance. One should not forget that the listeners and participants of these arguments were mainly young scholars—now professors, then carried by the wave of easy interpretations. Professor's speeches were awaited and listened to with great attention—he entrenched himself, was attacked but at the same time respected. Respected to such a degree that the same year saw the edition of his pre-war *History of Polish Literature from the Middle Ages to the 19th Century* — although the publisher's note warned the readers that the book was written before the II World War.

He had been publishing a lot for sixty three years and early distinguished himself. Stanisław Pigoń, an eminent historian of Polish literature, mentioned the group of students that came to Cracow University in autumn 1911: there was a young man among them „of swift wings but clawed”, „overwhelmed us with his knowledge and temperament”. We may easily guess the source of such an ornithological metaphor. It followed him from his Sanok school — „he is a dangerous bird,” it soon reached Cracow college that he „used to embarrass his professors” by asking questions which were „easy to ask, but difficult to answer”.

This tendency remained with him—the embarrassed himself, his professors, friends and pupils thus breaking up scholarly conventions; his difficult questions originated new and complicated problems. Perhaps in the field of science it is more important to ask a proper question—even without answering it—than to answer correctly unessential questions. Julian Krzyżanowski was in his unconsciousness impressed by the life of literature so he had examined it more and more carefully in all its forms and epochs, had learned more and more—and remained alone as no Polish scholar could equal him in erudition. He kept tracing the mysteries of literature till the end of his life, still in his last letters he asked questions like: when an ancient idiom „either with this shield or upon this shield” appears in Poland for the first time. This curiosity about literature brought him nearer to his aim and at the same time moved him away from it. Such curiosity cannot easily be satisfied, the aim withdraws as it is approached, but humanistic Polish studies would be impossible without it.

Such a contrast is necessary to understand the reasons for Julian Krzyżanowski's popularity among people not professionally concerned with Polish studies but simply interested in Polish culture and literature—it is enough to compare the frequency of reprints and the number of copies, or to compare the degree of trust in their au-

thor—a social value difficult to measure but essential for the creator of culture, determining his authentic prestige. The readers or listeners of Julian Krzyżanowski were sure that they should meet Julian Krzyżanowski who was always himself, who always spoke in plain words, who never tried to avoid answering a question by telling an anecdote—and if he ever introduced a recollective anecdote it was as a parallel, and then his listeners awaited its contemporary conclusion. In the times of abundance of imitation, lack of authenticity a man who manages to remain himself is of more use to everybody than a primitive painter's picture on the wall or an out-of-the-way part of a forest during the holidays—for who would not want to be oneself? With Julian Krzyżanowski one could not afford imitative gestures, one had to agree or disagree. He did not take the texts he had read professionally (I do not like it but it has its own value), he had his own criterion and judged according to it.

His readers did not always share his tastes and could not, for instance, easily accept some critical opinions about literature from the period between the Wars, included in his *History of Polish Literature* (1969), but nobody really aims at univocal voting as far as evaluation of literature is concerned. Here—opposing the popular saying—united we fall divided we stand. It is known that evaluation of literary texts included in books about literature is short-lived as it is pronounced from a personal point of view formed by the times, history, emotions and tastes of the generation. Out of these changeable opinions something remains as the tradition of evaluation, but a lot recedes, changes into history. Julian Krzyżanowski was following his own way but, I think, it was a way close to the Young Poland. Certainly as the times and literature were changing he moved away from *la belle époque* but in his scholarly system of values something remained from the first personal experience of new creativity, from the first participation in transformations of writing, perhaps as a sentiment or fidelity to youthful emotions when he got to know the works of neoromantics „straight away, absorbing them as news—awaited but sometimes difficult to obtain.” I would call it post-neoromantic but before Gombrowicz system of values.

The permanence of humanistic thought does not depend on esthetic opinions. Eminent Polish scholars who died after the War disappear from footnotes. But Julian Krzyżanowski will not share their fate thanks to these embarrassing questions he asked himself and others. They led to the establishment of new, large fields of research. He started for instance from tracing comparative and authorship enigmas of our Renaissance novel, solving them in articles, contributions, commentaries to editions and arrived at *Pseudo-historic Romance in 16th-century Poland* (1926) and *Polish Romance of the 16th Century* (1934). Thus he laid the foundation for the research concerned with the development of the novel, which should be continued with due regard to present theoretical questions but with the same reliability and reference to comparative literature which—as it came out—is not easy. In his book *Parallels* (1935, 1977) he designated a large field of research concerned with the connection between literature and folklore from the Middle Ages to neoromanticism. He had built the basis for Polish literary folklore studies through careful examining the net of facts subordinated, from the very beginning, to the realization of the needs of contemporary science. Thus *Polish Folk Fable in Systematic Order* (1967) or the basic book of our paroemiology *Few Words to the Wise Suffice* (1958–1960) came into being.

Literary Study (two editions), a classic synthesis of philology, comparative literature and folklore studies and of many years of the author's research work is the fundamental work from the theory of literature by Julian Krzyżanowski.

Julian Krzyżanowski was a close friend to this periodical. Here he published *Proverb*, his outstanding theoretical study, constantly quoted by Polish and foreign authors (vol. III, 1, pp. 5-14).

Till the end of this life he was starting important initiatives. Preparatory scientific meetings before Jan Kochanowski's Year took place in his house in Międzyńska street, and we are still waiting for the first Polish literary encyclopaedia edited by him to be published by the State Scientific Publishing House. Facts like those mentioned above make it difficult to believe—contrary to facts—that Julian Krzyżanowski is dead. He is still present in the field of scientific investigation, one has to agree or disagree with him. What we cannot do though, is confronting our opinion about a difficult problem with his. And here the absence of one of the few contemporary Poles of such high social prestige, so honestly earned will be most painfully felt.

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