



Roman Jakobson

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Roman Jakobson

Contribution to Morris Halle and Paul E. Gray (eds), *A Tribute to Roman Jakobson 1896–1982* (Berlin, 1983: Mouton), 69



I AM NOT QUALIFIED to assess the achievements of Roman Jakobson in the world of learning, or even of thought. But even I know that everyone who has ever read his work, or even met him, knows that he was a man of immense intellectual power, exceptional originality, audacity of thought and imaginative breadth and depth. His erudition was very great; he was a master of the provinces both of Slavic studies and linguistics, of extraordinary range. But I know of no one else in whom these attributes were combined with so rich a personal culture, so much insight, poetry and sheer creative genius, fused into astonishing unity by his controlled but deeply passionate temperament, which exercised so much sway over students, professional and amateur, of every subject that he touched.

I am proud and happy to have won his friendship; in his company one felt, as perhaps did many others, that one was on an ascending curve, more intelligent, more sensitive, more interesting

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than one in fact was or could be. This gift of being the cause of life and intellectual delight in others made every meeting, indeed, every form of association with him marvellously – and, if I may say so, permanently – exhilarating and wholly unforgettable. It is given to very few to be so inexhaustible a source of new and important ideas and increase of vitality and ingenuity of mind for so many in so many lands, beginning in his native Russia during the early years of the Revolution, and then wherever literature and language are held of account. I feel honoured and grateful to be given this opportunity of saying how much the genius and the friendship of this wonderful man meant to me.

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