

MARGARET SCHLAUCH¹
(1898-1986)

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Margaret Schlauch was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on 25th September 1898. She received her B.A. at Barnard College in 1918, her M.A. at Columbia in 1919 and her Ph.D. also at Columbia in 1927 (diss. *Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens*). Before receiving her Ph.D. she spent a year at the University of Munich (1923-24). In 1924 she began teaching at the New York University, first as an instructor (until 1927) and later as an assistant professor of English (1927-31), associate professor (1931-40) and full professor (1940-51). In the summer of 1937 she was a visiting associate professor of German at the University of Chicago and in the summer of 1939 a visiting associate professor of English at the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. The academic year 1929-30 Professor Schlauch spent at the University of Berlin studying Celtic languages under Professor J. Pokorny.

She was a victim of McCarthyism. Her sister married an eminent Polish physicist, a leftist, Prof. Leopold Infeld who was Einstein's collaborator and had close connections with the Los Alamos people. In 1951 he had to leave Canada on suspicions of espionage. M. Schlauch, an active member of the Communist Party of the United States also decided to leave her native country in order to avoid harassment and possibly loss of her academic post. She decided to choose Poland for her second homeland where her sister had already arrived from Toronto. She served her new country with utmost devotion to the end of her days, leaving an indelible imprint on the development of English studies in postwar Poland.

In 1951 she was appointed professor of English at the University of Warsaw. In 1954 she became head of the department of English and functioned in this ca-

¹ This is a revised version of the obituary published in *Poetica* 28 (1988): 1-4.

capacity until her retirement in 1965. From 1954 to 1956 Professor Schlauch was also head of the Department of General Linguistics.

She was a member of a number of professional organizations, including the Medieval Academy of America (member of the Council 1937-40), Modern Language Association of America (member of the Council 1938-42), Linguistic Society of America, Society of Advancement of Scandinavian Studies, American Association of University Women and Polish Linguistics Association. She was honorary member of English Literature Association, Hiroshima University.

In 1961 she was elected a corresponding member of the Polish Academy of Sciences. From 1954 to 1986 she was member of the Committee on Modern Languages and Literatures of the Academy.

Professor Schlauch was editor or member of the editorial board of *Speculum* (1933-36), *Science and Society* (1936), and *Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny* (1954-75).

She has left over 140 works. Some of the monographs and handbooks have been reprinted several times both in Poland and in other countries. Her research interests were broad and covered such areas as linguistic theory, history of English, history, Marxist philosophy, English and American literature (with particular emphasis on stylistics), Icelandic literature and comparative literature. From mid-thirties she consistently applied Marxist methodology both in her linguistic and literary studies.

In the area of linguistics Professor Schlauch concentrated on the critique of Bloomfield and his structuralism in "Early behaviorist psychology and contemporary linguistics" (1946) and "Mechanism and historical materialism in semantic studies" (1947). In 1936 she drew the attention of the American audience to the developments in Soviet linguistics. The same year she published a paper on the social basis of linguistics. In 1942 she published a popular introduction to language study (*The gift of tongues*) which had four editions (4th edition of *The gift of languages* appeared in 1955) and was favourably reviewed by a number of linguists, including M. Cohen, R. M. S. Heffner, C. T. Hodge and A. G. Haudricourt.

Her contributions to the history of English are in two areas, i.e. early colloquial English (studies on Chaucer and early Tudor English in 1952 and 1958 respectively) and the history of the language from the 14th c. until modern times (*Outline history of English*, 1952 and *The English language in modern times*, 2nd edition 1964). In the presentation of the development of English Professor Schlauch, unlike many other authors, includes syntax and stylistics.

In the field of English literature Professor Schlauch has written both on medieval and modern writers, from *Beowulf* and Chaucer to Shaw. But she was primarily an outstanding medievalist. Her synthetic work, *English medieval literature and its social foundations* (1956) belongs to unique achievements in the

field. Her interest in medieval English literature began with the Ph.D. dissertation on Chaucer, later followed by papers on *Beowulf*, an Old English encomium *urbis*, *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Pearl*.

Among her major works in other areas of English literature as well as American literature are *Modern English and American Poetry: Techniques and ideologies* (1956), *An outline of English versification* (1958; in Polish) and *The antecedents of the English novel 1400-1600* (1963).

Professor Schlauch (with John J. Parry) also published *A bibliography of Arthurian critical literature for the years 1930-35* (1936), supplemented in *MLQ* (1940) with the publications covering the years 1936-39.

In the field of comparative literature she published several contributions on a broad spectrum of topics ranging from literary relations between Angevin England and Sicily (1923), through a Russian study of the Tristan legend (1933), Icelandic sagas and French romance (1937), Scandinavian influences on the *Slovo o polku Igoreve* (1949), to Polish romantic poetry and *Edda* (1960).

Professor Schlauch's medieval interests went well beyond England. Her second major literary field was Icelandic sagas. She has translated and edited them, investigated their influence on European literatures and published critical studies about them. Among the translations, the most important are *The Saga of the Volsungs, the saga of Regmer Lodbrok, together with the lay of Krake* (1930), and *Three Icelandic Sagas* (translated together with M. H. Scargill in 1950). Her major critical work on Icelandic literature was *Romance in Iceland* (1934) which made Professor Schlauch one of the main world authorities in the field. The book received well-deserved recognition and was extremely favourably reviewed in fourteen journals on both sides of the Atlantic by such scholars as e.g. C. W. Wrenn, S. d'Ardenne, F. P. Magoun, Jr. and B. Dickins.

Professor Schlauch was also an outstanding teacher and a great friend of students. Her lectures and seminars were always full of enthusiasm for the subject, lively and inspiring. She had the rare gift of making most difficult and dreary topics interesting and fascinating. She has educated several generations of Polish anglicists and has laid foundations for modern studies of English in Poland.

As a person she was extremely modest and friendly, always ready to help, taking serious interest not only in the scholarship of her students and colleagues but also in their personal problems. We will remember her as an erudite scholar, an outstanding teacher and a person of great integrity. She remained faithful to her youthful ideals of social justice until her last days.