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Several Thoughts on Dorotha Simonides's Anniversary

(*19 November, 1928)

Within the context of European folkloristics, Professor Dorota Simonides is an extraordinary figure one can meet only very rarely. She has distinguished herself by her scholarly work in the field of folk culture, but she has also been known as a relentless organiser, educationalist and politician. Only interested researchers and colleagues who have had the opportunity to follow her professional, cultural and social growth over many years and be part of her family and personal life will understand how all these activities can become interrelated. The books and studies that she has written usually deal with oral folk culture and changes which have occurred in this area in Upper Silesia, a region abundant in folk traditions preserved up to the present. She has used every occasion to study folk culture of this borderland region in its traditional expression as well as the ongoing process of changes, questions of identity, ethnicity, Polish-German relations and other current issues regarding German minority in Polish Silesia. Only her meticulous fieldwork and a huge amount of material thus obtained enabled her to publish so many books and articles important not only from the point of ethnology but also because of their social and cultural dimension. Dorota Simonides could also fully employ her expertise as a politician, when she worked for the Unia Wolności in the Senate in 1990 - 1993 and as the chair of the Commission for Emigration and the Poles Living Abroad and since 1990 as a member of the Commission of Foreign Affairs.

Professor Dorota Simonides, neé Badura, was born on 19 November 1928 at Janov by Katowice into a family of workers and miners. Because most of the family enjoyed playing music, there were various musical instruments hanging on the wall by which she had her bed. Her father and brothers used to go playing music at weddings and so there were always some trumpets and other musical

instruments at home. Dorota became the first one to interrupt the family tradition of amateur musicians as she was determined to get appropriate education. She attended both primary and secondary school in Opole and after her school leaving examinations she decided to go on to university. In 1951 – 1955, she did Polish Studies and Ethnography at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. In 1953 – 1955. she also studied at the university in Wroclay. Among the teachers at both of the universities there were well-known philologists and ethnographers, as professors Leh-Splawiński, Pigón, Kolbuszewski, Moszyński and Gładysz, After graduation from university she worked as a teacher at primary school at Kedzierzyne for two vears, but when Prof. Kolbuszewski established a Department for Polish Literature at the High School of Pedagogy (WSP) in Opole, she nearly immediately changed jobs and started teaching there. In 1962 she defended her dissertation thesis on Śłaskie baikoznawsto and in 1970 she became a "habilitated doctor of humanities". At the same time the title of "external professor" was conferred upon her and in 1984 she became a "regular professor". Although Prof. Simonides performed a great variety of roles at the WSP in Opole, which later converted into Opole University, she assumed another one when she founded the Department of Folkloristics there. She conducted lectures and seminars not only at Opole University but also at other Polish universities, e.g. in Poznań and Wrocław, and at academic institutions in Freiburg, Tübingen, Zurich, Basel and elsewhere.

Of those many positions she has held until recently that of the Chair of the *Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawce* and her membership in some other organisations should be remembered. Since 1982 she has been a member of the *Komitét Stawianoznawstva PAN*, she is a member and a honorary member of the *Commission for Slavic Folklore with the International Committee of Slavists* (CSFICS), since 1974 she has been a member of the *International Committee for the Study of Folk Culture in the Carpathians and in the Balkans* and a member of the *International Society for Folk-Narrative Research* (ISFNR) and the *International Society for Ethnology and Folklore* (ISEF). Since 1974 her work has been awarded with several prizes not only in Poland but also abroad. One of the most valuable prizes bestowed upon her in a foreign country is the European Prize of J. G. Herder awarded to her in 1998.

Without any doubt, the most important Simonides's contribution to folkloristics is her professional activity. Its enormous extent may be proved by a selected bibliography which has been compiled only of those works from which the younger generation of ethnographers can draw inspiration. Her scholarly work, based in oral folklore, encompasses traditional and contemporary folklore traditions – folklore rituals, children's folklore, as well as the theory and the methodology of folkloristics. She has also been concerned with changes in this field after 1945, i.e. with problems of national identity and cultural integration. Impressive are her comparative studies of Polish and German folklore material on which she based her first book Baśń i podanie górnósląskie (1961). In her habilitation thesis Współczesna śląska proza ludova (1969) she discussed the process of changes occurring within the traditional and contemporary oral folklore. In

Powstania śląskie we współczesnych opowidaniach ludowych (1972) she captured commemorative narratives welded together by the topic of uprisings. This book dealing with components of historical awareness may be useful as a source not only for ethnologists but also for historians and sociologists. Of great interest are Simonides's specialised publications united by a theme of children's and youth's folklore, including Współczesny folklor słowny dieci i nastolatków (1976), Ele mele dudki: Rymowanki dzieci śląskich (1985) and O współczesny pamiętnikach dzieci (1993), understandable to a broader non-scientific readership. Drawing on rich material sources, analysed in terms of origin, functions and mechanisms maintaining the genre of children's folklore alive, she claims that even nowadays it is still a living and spontaneously appearing phenomenon.

Another sphere of interest to which Dorota Simonides has been committed since the beginning of her professional career until recently is that of humour. This is clearly evidenced by a number of monographs, studies and other publications accessible to a wider readership. In her books Bery śmieszne i ucieszne: Humor śląski (issued five times in 1967 – 1992), Kniega humoru ludowego (produced together with J. Hajduk-Nijakowska and T. Smolińska) and Bery to nie tylko gruszki, czili rzecz o humore śląskim (1984), employing the results of her immense fieldwork, she manages to get deep to the very source of the modern humorous narratives which she identifies as the transgressing of the social norms and customs of a particular locality or region. She states that many of them owe their origin to migrating topics consequently modified under the impact of local geographic conditions, history and customs. Being coloured by the local dialect they exhibit features entirely ingenious of such a region.

Long-term research is also behind one of the most peculiar Simonides's books called *Śląski horror*: O diablach, skarbnikach, utopcach a innych strachach (1984). Here she proves that folklore traditions containing superstitious narratives, folk tales and humorous narratives are still alive because the process of revitalising traditional and international subjects and motifs constantly generates new texts. This monograph is regarded as the first one exploring Upper-Silesian superstitious narratives.

Another monograph *Folklor Górneho Śląska* (1989) yields evidence of Prof. Simonides's abilities as a manager and editor. Not only did she come up with the idea of writing the book but, in 1976 – 1980, she also brought together and managed large groups of people who showed an interest in the traditions of Upper Silesia. This monograph presents folk traditions from a very broad perspective and as such it deals with music folklore, ritual and dance folklore, methodology, changes in traditional and contemporary folklore, the bearers of folk traditions, folk (naïve) writers, the Silesian dialect and a history of Upper Silesia.

The second monograph developing the theme of Silesian folk culture edited by D. Simonides is *Kultura ludowa śląskiej ludnosti rodzimej* (1991). This book covering not only Upper and Lower Silesia but also Cieszyn Silesia was conceived much more broadly in comparison with the previous one. It deals with the issues of colonisation, building construction, agriculture, folk costumes, art as well as

worldview, anniversaries and family rituals and customs, each of which has been developed in a separate chapter. All of them testify to the indigenous Slavic character of Silesian culture despite the fact it had absorbed elements of culture from neighbouring regions.

The very first contacts and meetings of Slovak researchers with Professor Dorota Simonides were in the 1980s after and agreement was signed between the Institute of Ethnology of SM and Pracowňa literatury ludowei in Warsaw. embracing other Polish academic and university institutions. In the group of research workers engaged in the study of West-Slavic culture was also B. Simonides. A group of Czech, Slovak and Polish researches consisting of J. Jech. K. D. Kadłubiec, N. and R. Šrámek, V. Gašparíková and L. Simonides embarked on fieldwork in the Moravian borderland to study selected superstitious folk tales in terms of their repeatability and perseverance in fairy-tales, folk legends and songs. The results of the fieldwork were scrutinised during meetings in academic institutions in Prague and Bratislava. Moreover, they associated with the agenda of the International Commission for Slavic Folklore with the Committee for Slavic Folklore. There were not only the superstitious narratives which seemed interesting because of their vitality. Much attention was also given to humour and the ways it was rendered in folk narratives. In 1972, when Spievajúca lipka. composed of West-Slavic fairy-tales, was published in seven language versions due to Professor P. Ned's efforts, and which is still being published in various selections for children, the group decided to give much greater attention to the humour of West Slavs. The Polish edition of Skarb w garncu: Humor ludowy Słowian zachodnich appeared twice - in 1979 and 1988. They were intended to demonstrate what makes the humorous narratives, jokes and anecdotes of West Slavs so close and, on the other hand, what makes them different from other European nations' humour, both in the past and the present. The plans for publishing the book in several language versions were not materialised however the authors were persuaded about the usefulness of such a publication since humour, as an inseparable part of both everyday and festive events, is manifested not only in folklore but also in various cultural activities.

The closest cooperation developed within the International Commission for the Study of Folk Culture in the Carpathians and in the Balkans (ICCB). Results of the research studies done in the previous years manifested that folklore ballads about bandits (outlaws) associate not only with one territory but have parallels in others, mainly in the Carpathians. The international conference held in Smolenice in 1976 brought an agreement stating that one of the synthetic works based on the results of research studies into folk culture conducted up to that time would be dedicated to the traditions of outlaws in the broadest sense of the word. The research team composed of D. Simonides (Poland), G. Batezatu (Moldavia), S. Mišanyč (Ukraine) and I. Küllös (Hungary) was led B. N. Putilov and V. Gašparíková, who were in charge of the programme. To coordinate work of such a team was quite difficult because every group consisted of a number of researchers from one country. In Poland, for instance, Professor B. Simonides managed to

unite D. Simonides, T. Smolinska, Z Pasecki, E. Bocek Orzzyszek, who were working in various areas, into a group that successfully completed the abovementioned task. Cooperation with the international team, especially with the Polish colleagues, was very good and progressed in accordance with the plans. But because of the disintegration of the "eastern block", it was impossible to publish the international synthesis on bandit traditions in Moscow. The book was printed with the support of the European Folklore Institute in Budapest only in 2002. The international cooperation and the research into the theme of outlaws deserve much praise: on the one hand, this theme could be studied from the perspective of one's own nation, on the other, it could be treated from the European, sometimes even world folklore's perspective. This was also a period of very fruitful cooperation with Dorota Simonides and other colleagues from Poland. First of all, it brought inspiring exchanges of opinions at the professional level, but it was also a time of unrepeatable friendly meetings, very good interpersonal relations distant from the real world, everyday duties and political or social differences.

This short survey of life and work of so a prominent Polish folklorist as Professor Dorota Simonides certainly is would remain incomplete if her great human dimension were not mentioned. She has many outstanding qualities: she is hardworking, intelligent, full of natural humour, able to precisely categorise her thoughts, organise work for herself and her team; she is decisive and always completes her tasks; she also works on keeping her physical and mental wellbeing, and so on. I have to say that we felt very close immediately at the very first meeting. We became friends not only because of the same year of birth and the same profession but also because we found out that we had the same views on life, world and society in which we lived. We helped each other to such an extent that we shared nearly everything we had. When we were younger, our close collaboration in the field of science and our friendship led us to celebrating the New Year's Eve together, in her home in Opole. In order to share our happiness with other members of the research team we always phoned everyone to wish them good health and much success at work in the coming year. Needless to say our children became close friends, too, and communicated among themselves from the very first moments as if they had known one another from their early childhood. We used to go and see each other or we spent holidays together. Although the "face-to-face" contacts are rarer today, we still exchange letters and have frequent telephone calls. As D. Simonides says "people are brought together by common fieldwork and everything associated with it, for instance, discussions, various life situations, friendly talks, ..." When summing all this up I should underline that she has always appreciated these "complementary elements" of research studies very much because, according to her, they make it possible to get acquainted with other people, cultures, languages, as well as with mentality and customs of other nations.

Dear Prof. Simonides, dear Dorota, I am coming to congratulate you on behalf of our collaborators and colleagues and also in my name on the awarding of your "doctor honoris causa" title this year. All of us are sending you our best wishes of good health and many warm sunny days enjoyed with your family and friends as well as every success with getting even deeper insight into our folk traditions.

Viera Gašparíková

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Congratulations to Ján Botík

(*11 November, 1938)

Ján Botík, an ethnographer, museum worker, university professor and publicist is celebrating his 70th birthday in 2008.

His life of a scientist is like a well-designed building, flexibly reacting to changing conditions and challenges brought about by various time periods and their needs. His brief *curriculum vitae* says that he started his professional career at the Department of Ethnography, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, where he worked as a research assistant in 1963 – 1967.

For another long twenty years, Ján Botík associated his life with the Institute of Ethnography, Slovak Academy of Sciences. In 1977 – 1985, he stood at the head of the Department of Ethnography. In 1989 – 1990, he was the managing director of the Slovak National Museum (SNM) – Ethnographic Museum in Martin. From there, he moved to the Historical Museum of the SNM in Bratislava to work there in 1991-2005 as a custodian and the head of the Documentary Centre for Croatian culture which deals with Slovaks living abroad. In 1995, he received the title of *Dozent* (associate professor) for ethnography. At that time he worked for the Department of Ethnology and Social Anthropology, Faculty of Arts Comenius University in Bratislava. In 2002, when he became a university professor, he started teaching students of folkloristics and religious studies at the Faculty of Arts, University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra. In 2003, he obtained the title of Doctor of Historical Sciences.

When meeting common people in rural areas, which served as the only sphere of ethnographic research for quite a long time, Ján Botík showed his communicative skills and employed his "well-tuned ears" and "sharp eyes" to capture characteristic features of a particular territory and record them both in texts and photographs. His idea of the "making of ethnography at home" meant to collect, record, reconstruct and explain the vanishing phenomena of the traditional peasant