HENRY KAHANE

Henry R. Kahane was born on November 2, 1902, in Berlin, Germany, 'an Austrian in the German world' (Kahane 1992b:40).* He was raised in the intellectually stimulating world of theatre and literature and it was there that he began his formal academic life with *Literaturwissenschaft*, gradually moving into Romance linguistics. Henry was drawn to linguistics, 'attracted by the magnetic personality of Ernst Gamillscheg, a trail-blazing genius, who, up to his death in 1971, was inexhaustible in linguistic themes and explanations and, despite political flings, of an incorruptible professional objectivity' (ibid.). Gamillscheg was to have a multifold impact on Henry's life. It was in this professor's seminar, in 1927, that Henry met Renée, née Toole, of Irish ancestry born in Cephalonia, Ionian Island. It was through Renée's influence that Henry developed his interest in Mediterranean studies. Two other European scholars who also left an indelible impact on Henry in relating language and history were Max Leopold Wagner (1880–1962) and Gerhard Rohlfs (1892–1986).

The lives of Henry and Renée were a unique blend of harmony, mutual dedication, and utter devotion—they were an inseparable academic pair. What mattered above all was their commitment to their chosen scholarly fields. The two transmitted their intellectual earnestness and intense curiosity to their colleagues across disciplinary boundaries. The Kahanes' lives revolved around room 427 in the University of Illinois Library Building. Their schedule was watch-settingly predictable: at 9 A.M., at 12 noon, and at 5 P.M. one would see them going to and fro from home to the office, every day, all week long except the occasional Sunday. The lifestyle of the Kahanes was observed by generations of colleagues, students, and academic administrators with a keen interest, almost bordering on envy. It represented 'a unique, enviable example of the perfect reconcilability, for both husband and wife between a rich and balanced family life and the rigor and austerity of advanced research'.[1]

Who contributed what to their list of joint scholarly research is difficult to determine. Once when confronted with this question, Henry's answer was, 'my wife has the ideas and I write them'. And, as one would expect, Renée retorted, 'I think that is not right'. Henry was quick to clarify: 'Teamwork is a very complicated thing. As ideas develop, one gives one thing and the other changes it, and then the first one again'.[2] This was indeed the secret of the Kahanes' harmonious and productive relationship as scholars and as two delightful individuals.

In his inimitable way, Henry summed up their research agendas of fifty years in most succinct words:

> If we look back, then, after fifty years, the emigration evolved as the dominant event in our lives, as it did with many of our fellow refugees. . . . We became, and we remain, pre-War Europeans ever trying to grow into Americans. This complex process of adaptation is latent also in our work: the diachronic, historical world view, instinctive with the European humanists of our generation, clashes, time and again, with the American impulse to explain in the synchronic terms of system and structure; and we believe that a blend of the two approaches has become the mark of analyses. We are linguists, cultural

* This piece draws in part on my brief memorial tribute in Kachru 1992:97–100.

[1] See *Illinois Alumni News*, February 1973, p. 14.

[2] Ibid.

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> linguists and sociolinguists, and therefore inclined to formulate the big questions of life in terms of language. (Kahane 1986:16)

In 1931, after Renée completed her dissertation on the morphological problem of the augmentative feminine in Romance, the Kahanes were married in Greece. Their marriage 'created one of the most remarkable cases of cooperation of two scholars' (Zgusta 1993:45; see also Zgusta 1994). This collaboration is evident in almost all of their books, scholarly papers, and reviews. There is one word that encapsulates the relationship of Renée and Henry—she was Henry's *ardhānginī*, a Sanskrit word that means an inalienable half of the body, a wife.[3]

In May 1938, Henry was imprisoned for a week in Florence, Italy when Hitler was visiting the city to create the Axis with Mussolini. Many Germans and Austrians were held hostage and put in prison:

> I must confess [a week in prison] is quite an educational experience. An intelligent man, a former official in the Prussian penal system, had advised me to, whenever prison looms, put as much money as possible in your pocket: in prison you cannot rely on credit, you have to pay cash. My Florentine prison was like an expensive hotel. Whatever we got, whether food or service, was taken off the amount we had deposited at the reception desk. Every morning I was shaved, with tender care, by a lifer who had murdered an entire family. Never again had I a more friendly barber. (Kahane 1986:12)

The calamities in Europe and the political turmoil of the Hitler revolution ultimately brought the Kahanes to New York at Christmas in 1939 after an enforced waiting period in Greece where they completed a book entitled *Italienische Ortsnamen in Griechenland* (1940), published in Athens in a series directed by the medievalist Nikos Bees. The move from Europe to the US was not easy. One of the first things they did in New York before moving to Los Angeles—Henry particularly emphasized it—was to join the Linguistic Society of America. Henry worked there from 1939–1941 as a research assistant in comparative literature at the University of Southern California. And two years later, in 1941, they moved to Illinois, where they made their permanent academic home. This relocation and emigration to America 'meant to me (among other things, to be sure) the transfer from a diachronic state of mind to a synchronic'. And elaborating on this distinction, Henry said, 'Diachronic and synchronic interpretations of the world around us go far beyond academic disciplines; they are, in their different concern for yesterday and today, different forms of life, and I had to adjust to the new way' (Kahane 1992b:40).

In their research 'Kahane adopted the American approach to linguistics, with its emphasis on structuralism; Renée Kahane, however, continued to bring to bear on dialectology the classic methods of research which she had absorbed in Europe' (Malkiel & de Marco 1993:299).

[3] Professor Rajeshwari Pandharipande (p.c.) explains the concept *ardhānginī* as follows:

a. literally means 'half of the body' or one who is an inalienable half of the body, and inferentially, the term means 'wife', who is an inseparable half of her husband;
b. in the Purāṇas, specially in the Shiva Purāṇa, Pārvatī is frequently referred to as Shiva's Ardhānginī (Shiva's wife).

The image of Shiva as half-man and half-woman has another interpretation in the tradition. Shiva is viewed as the representation of the Divine in whom the dichotomy of apparent contradictions (light and dark, man and woman, etc.) does not exist. This philosophical thought/concept/belief is represented in the image of Shiva, whose fusion with his wife is seen as the symbol of the fusion of the (apparent) opposites. In this context, the term may be interpreted as the 'inseparable, and equally important half' of the totality of existence.

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In America's new social and cultural contexts, Henry demonstrated that he possessed in abundance the qualities he had admired in his European guru, Gamillscheg. As years passed, Kahane himself became an institution at the University of Illinois.

Those who came in contact with Henry—students, colleagues, and administrators—saw multiple facets of his personality: his wit and the twinkle in his eyes, his contagious dynamism and boundless dedication and commitment to scholarship, and his astute qualities as an academic administrator and promoter. Above all, they saw that he was a perfect gentleman with a positive attitude. Henry was a 'genuine humanist' and a renaissance man, an institution in more senses than one. Henry was also a rebel, an activist, and the catalyst for challenge and change: he was indifferent to conventions, ignored dominant disciplinary paradigms and academic and administrative norms, and possessed extraordinary skill in building bridges between the present and the challenging future.

We see Henry's vision in his enthusiastic support of Robert B. Lees's (1922–1996) appointment to lead the yet-unborn Department of Linguistics at Illinois in 1962. In the 1960s, this vision put the future department at the cutting edge of the changing paradigm in the linguistic sciences in the US. Lees was an apostle of an emerging paradigm: provocative, unconventional, and often devastating in his arguments. In his personality and in his conceptualization of the linguistic sciences, he was very different from Henry, but that did not matter. The far-sighted Henry saw in Lees 'the orthodox representative of standard transformation theory, a brilliant intellectual . . .', who, as the first head, 'gave the department its decisive direction and put it on the map' (Kahane 1992a:39). The rest, as they say, is history.

The Henry we knew in the classroom, in academic administration, and in social interaction was not in tune with the material progress of our times. In 1973 Henry responded to an interviewer's question in his charming, almost consciously preserved European accent, in these words: 'I don't drive. I don't fly. I don't use a typewriter and I never look at television. I am a European, and I am very afraid of machines'.[4] In 1984, however, Henry was elected President of the Linguistic Society of America; the position naturally entailed travel, and he had to change his mind. And once Henry and Renée found their wings, there was no stopping them.

Kahane was a splendid performer, and the classroom was his stage: even in his later years, his love for classroom performance did not diminish:

> For me, still today, the classroom is a theatre, the teacher's desk, the stage, and the teacher himself a performer—on a high level to be sure (or so we believe)—and a flop if he is not lively, stimulating, or personal, even with a subject matter as brittle as historical grammar. (Kahane 1992b:41)

Henry believed that there is a link between teaching and writing: 'teaching has always helped me to write, so writing has always helped me to teach' (ibid.). What added to this elegance and eloquence as an educator was Henry's inquisitive spirit; his colleague, Ladislav Zgusta, says, '[Henry] loved to know things and participate in happenings; that is probably why he seriously considered the career of a journalist and therefore spent a year as a correspondent of a German daily in Istanbul' (Zgusta 1993:1). And, almost with a sigh of relief, Zgusta adds, 'Minerva won over Mercurius and Henry returned to the academic life' (ibid.). What Zgusta says about Henry's short journalistic career is insightfully related to his academic career by Henry himself in these words:

> What I know about teaching I owe to two highly educated but non-academic experiences. For a few years, right after my doctorate, I became foreign correspondent in the Balkanic area for a large and

[4] See *Illinois Alumni News*, February 1973, p. 14.

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> prestigious newspaper, the *Berliner Tageblatt*; both the pressure for lucid phrasing and summary and a constant awareness of the reader's level of comprehension formed a unique curriculum in Teacher Training. (Kahane 1992b:41)

In his teaching, as in his research, Henry believed that '[t]oday's linguistic scholar is a man of many trades, a rider in many saddles' (Kahane 1978). That indeed is true of the Kahanes: Their manyfold research interests are evident in their total *oeuvre*.

The Kahanes' earlier research was on etymological investigations. In the 1960s the focus changed to the Hellenistic heritage of the West via Arabic and Jewish sources. Their earlier etymological and onomastic approach 'led them to a gnostic interpretation of various symbols in the song of Roland; to a new and Hermetic explanation of Chrétien's *Perceval* and Wolfram's *Perzíval*; and to the tracing of gnomologic, magic, and astronomic tradition underlying certain puzzling treatises of the Alfonsine circle' (Pietrangeli 1973:1–2).

The Kahanes' publications cover a wide range of topics: Romance and Mediterranean lexicology, Byzantium and the West, the Hellenistic heritage in the West, structural analysis, literary history, humanistic linguistics, and the East and West in medieval literature, roughly corresponding to the grouping in Pietrangeli's bibliography of their work (1973).[5] The works they were involved in, either together or with others, include: *Italienische Ortsnamen in Griechenland* (1940), *Spoken Greek* (1945–46), *Descriptive studies in Spanish grammar* (1954), *Development of verbal categories in child language* (1958), *Lingua franca in the Levant* (1958), *Structural studies on Spanish themes* (1959), *The Krater and the Grail* (1965), *Glossario degi antichi portolani italiani* (1967), and *Abendland und Byzanz: Sprache* (1970). Selected articles and reviews have been published in three volumes of their collected works (1979, 1981, 1986).

In their post-'retirement' years, the Kahanes remained intellectually vital. It was during this period that they explored yet another dimension of language: 'to elucidate the function of language in Western society, with the Greco-Latin model representing the prototype of the process' (Kahane 1991:202). The aim was to develop a typology of the field, termed HUMANISTIC LINGUISTICS, which encompasses 'those aspects of language which correlate with the *paideia* of Western man, with his spiritual existence: man as he creates language and is influenced by it, as he is linked to the past through language and yet aware of its vital implications—creativity/relativity/historicity/attitudes' (Kahane & Kahane 1983:84). This development, Henry believed, was:

> the development exemplified by the five Renaissances of the past and by the present state of endeavors, numerous concrete topics representing basic humanistic aspects of language have become clearly distinguishable, in particular: discourse analysis/translations (as applied theory)/linguistic field/onomasiology/stylistics/lexicography. (ibid.)

The Kahanes agreed that the above-mentioned topics had 'remained rather stable'; what had changed were 'responses to them and the techniques of analysis'. In their view, 'this ongoing interplay of tradition and renewal is, in itself, a humanistic process' (ibid.).

The Kahanes were conscious of their bilinguality and its deep implications for the émigré's life:

> To us, the refugee is first of all a bilingual. But, bilingualism, in this context, does not refer to those first steps in communication: phonology, syntax, and lexicon. We are beyond that stage. The real bilingualism of the immigrant consists in the ever-growing awareness that the longer he lives in his new country the less he operates with two contrastive language systems and the more he confronts the

[5] See also Pietrangeli 1962 for another Kahane bibliography.

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> two culture systems hidden behind them. To really master both cultures we need, at the least, another half century. (Kahane 1986:16–17)

It was a time when bilingualism had not yet attracted the serious attention of theoretical or applied linguists. Einar Haugen draws our attention to it in a now-classic paper from the 1950s. He reminds us that the linguistic conceptualization of bilingualism and bilinguals' creativity, both popularly and scientifically, was in dispute. Haugen makes a poignant observation that 'just as the bilingual himself often was a marginal personality, so the study of his behavior was a marginal scientific pursuit' (Haugen 1950:272).

In retrospect, as Henry looked back 'at the panorama of linguistics as my personal experience', he saw it 'to be marked, above all, by its continuity', a continuity which is, says Kahane, 'stretching from the teachers of my teachers to the discipline of my disciples [and] comprises a full century, and a period, in the history of linguistics, of dramatic cognitive transformations' (Kahane 1991:202). Relating the changes to his and Renée's personal lives, he added:

> To us, the changes of the discipline were emphasized through their link with our personal life: the emigration from Europe to America, from a history-oriented diachronic culture to a sociology-oriented synchronic one. In their essence, the ever-changing approaches to language which we have witnessed tally with the changes in the zeitgeist. Taking the variations of style in modern art, with their polar conflict between 'overt' and 'covert', as an explicit expression of the changing zeitgeist, their succession parallels quite closely the succession of linguistic 'schools' centering on the dichotomy between 'surface' and 'deep structure'. The linguist's advance from Positivism through Idealism, Structuralism, and Transformationalism to today's Formalism, reflects, essentially, the spiritual road that Western culture has taken through the last century: from Realism through Impressionism, Functionalism and Expressionism to Abstractionism. (ibid)

In considering Kahane's accomplishments and his *oeuvre* in retrospect, Yakov Malkiel and Barbara de Marco observe:

> One is tempted to judge his oeuvre by comparing it to that of other European Romanists who spent significant periods of time in this country. Yet some (e.g., Amado Alonso and A. Levi) were in America far too short a time to warrant the comparison; some (e.g., Américo Costa and Manfred Sadmann) returned to Europe after the war. There are those (e.g., John Corominas) whose work is not a credit to their American sojourn, and yet others (e.g., Leo Spitzer and Tomas Navarro, who stayed in North America, refusing to return to Spain) who developed new interests after their migration. (Malkiel & de Marco 1993:300–301)

And contrasting their work with Kahane they say, 'Henry Kahane cultivated a European style of scholarship, yet left no doubt as to his loyalty to this country, as well as to his appreciation of the many opportunities that life in America gave him' (ibid.).

In addition to his teaching and rigorous academic work, Henry was an excellent academic administrator. At Illinois, he initiated and directed the Program in Linguistics (1960–1962) and ultimately succeeded in creating the Department of Linguistics. The earlier initiative to introduce some linguistic courses at the University of Illinois is credited to Leonard Bloomfield (1887–1949), who taught at the university for eleven years (1910–1921) in the German department and in 1913 was given the title Assistant Professor of Comparative Philology and German. Recalling Bloomfield and his time at the University of Illinois, Henry observed:

> It was the period in which *Urform* of his influential *Language* (1933) had just appeared as *An Introduction to the Study of Language* (New York, 1914). The early version shows that a mentalistic–psychological approach to language strongly influenced by Wilhelm Wundt still dominated the curriculum which Bloomfield had established. (After he left Illinois for Ohio, Chicago, and Yale, he discarded the mentalistic approach for the mechanistic). (Kahane 1992a:37)

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It was in 1956 that Henry, the trail-blazer, began his fight for an independent department. It was not easy. His initiatives generated scores of pleas, controversies, and arguments with a variety of administrators, guarding their own disciplinary territories. When asked what strategies he had finally used to convince the administration, Henry answered with his typical Kahane humor: 'It was very simple. I made it a point to visit the dean every week and stress the importance of a department of linguistics on this campus. He would throw me out the door and I would come back through the window. Finally, I succeeded'.

There was really no retirement for Henry even after he 'retired' in 1971. In his post-retirement period, he kept 'retiring' year after year. During this time, he did much of his administrative work, being appointed leader of seven different academic units at the university, including four departments, one division, one program, and the Center for Advanced Study. Former University of Illinois Chancellor Morton W. Weir summed up this facet of Henry's contributions by calling him 'our administrative pinch-hitter', who 'in his quiet, intelligent, perceptive way' led many units of the university, 'some of which were in turmoil when he was asked to preside over them' (Weir 1992:93).

Henry had a long and distinguished career in linguistics, and the profession has honored him in multiple ways: two Guggenheim Fellowships (1955–1956, 1962–1963); Outstanding Educator in America (1974); the Silver Award of the Academy of Athens (1977); honorary degrees from Humboldt University of Berlin, the Freie University of Berlin, the University of Berlin, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (1977); Member, US National Committee for Byzantine Studies (1981); Fellow, Dumbarton Oaks Research Institute (1985); and Fellow, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1989). He served as President of the Linguistic Society of America (1984) and was one of the most active members of the Center for Advanced Study (1968–) at the University of Illinois, including serving as its Acting Director in 1971–1972.

In his death, as in his life, Henry had a lesson to teach. He passed away in his home in Urbana on Friday, September 11, 1992, just fifty-one days short of his ninetieth birthday. One day before, on Thursday, he was enthusiastically talking with me, in his usual sanguine and firm Kahanian way, of his future research plans, specifically about the festschrift volume to honor our mutual friend and colleague Ladislav Zgusta. The volume, entitled *Cultures, ideologies, and the dictionary: Studies in honor of Ladislav Zgusta*, appeared in 1995, jointly edited by Henry and me. The day after our discussion, Friday, at 7:30 P.M., Renée called my wife, Yamuna, to convey the grim message that Henry was no longer with us. Two hours later, when Henry's body was taken from their home, there were just five of us there to say goodbye to him: Renée Kahane, Mariam Ahmed, Yamuna and Amita Kachru, and me. We represented the world's three ancient cultural traditions: the Judeo-Christian, the Hindu, and the Islamic. It was not planned: it just happened that way—the karmic wheel. It was like a convergence of major faiths and philosophies of life and living. Henry, the humanist, would have liked it that way, for he did not believe in the boundaries of cultures and regions. All his long life he crisscrossed those boundaries in his scholarship and in his personal life. As the black hearse gradually disappeared, it was almost dark, and we wistfully watched, sensing the end of an era as it carried away one who has been called a prince among teachers and a scholar's scholar, and most importantly, a perfect gentleman. We walked back to Henry's living room, misty-eyed. And there was Renée, dignified and serene, and even at that moment of loss, concerned about the comfort of the four of us. Henry's body was cremated and, as Henry had wished, the ashes were scattered in the woods

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not far from the city of Urbana, which he had made his physical and intellectual home for over fifty-one years.

Although we were not to know it at the time, Henry's passing did indeed mark an end of sorts. After his death, colleagues and friends of Henry's, including Ladislav Zgusta, hoped that Renée would 'complete all the manuscripts this par nobile et incredible maritorum had no time to finish together' (Zgusta 1993:48). This was not to be. Only a few weeks after Henry's death, Yamuna asked Renée if we could help her to make arrangements for completing their unfinished research projects: 'No, Yamuna, I don't feel like touching those papers anymore without Henry', Renée replied in an almost inaudible whisper. And she did not; she never went back to what had been their office in 427 Library Building. The inseparable academic team's work was, indeed, only possible as a team. Renée passed away ten years later in Chicago on December 10, 2002. However, no end is final, and the Kahanes have left their legacy: they are survived by a daughter, Roberta Garner, born in Europe, a son, Charles Kahane, born in the US, four grandchildren, and a lasting body of scholarly work that has informed new generations of scholars.[6] (BRAJ B. KACHRU, *University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*)

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[6] A secular memorial service was held on November 14, 1992 at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Illinois, attended by a large number of the Kahanes' family, colleagues, friends, students, and admirers. The memorial tributes (see Kachru 1992) were paid by Elmer H. Antonsen, Larry R. Faulkner, Roberta Kahane Garner, Braj B. Kachru, Charles Kahane, Morton W. Weir, and Ladislav Zgusta. On behalf of the Linguistic Society of America, Professor Zgusta said:

> One of the national organizations in which Henry played an important role was the Linguistic Society of America, by the number of its members probably the greatest professional society of linguists in the world. . . . I can not fail to mention that it is not only the executive officers of the Society who asked me to bring their condolences to this memorial gathering: I received a phone call from the secretary asking me also to mention how deeply saddened the whole staff of the Secretariat's office is and what a fond memory they all have of Henry's kindness and pleasant way of reaching decisions when he was President of the Society. It seems to me that to be remembered in such a warm way is typical for Henry's ways of dealing with people. (Zgusta 1992:95–96)

The Department of Linguistics established a 'Henry R. Kahane Award for Outstanding Teaching Assistant in Non-Western Languages' and also named the linguistics library of the department 'Henry and Renée Kahane Linguistics Research Room'.

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