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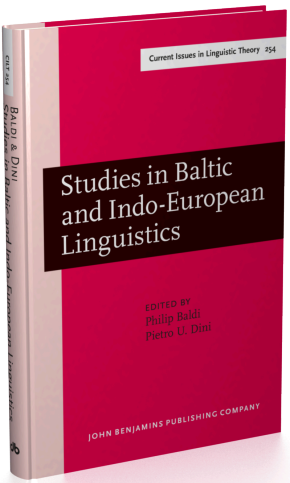

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WILLIAM R. SCHMALSTIEG: THE MAN AND THE SCHOLAR

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Capturing the essence of a career as rich and varied as that of William R. Schmalstieg (henceforth Bill) is a challenging task. But it is a task which we approach with enthusiasm and a deep sense of respect for Bill and the impact he has had not only on us as individual scholars, but also on at least three areas of linguistics (Baltic, Slavic, and Indo-European) over a span of nearly 50 years. One of us (Baldi) has known him and walked in his shadow for more than 30 years at Penn State University. Yet despite the depth of our friendship and the total collegiality and mutual support we have enjoyed for all this time, it occurred to Baldi and Dini that Bill's unremitting self-effacement has in a way prevented us from getting to know the man behind the linguist. And it seemed clear that if we as colleagues and friends have much to learn about Bill, the wider communities in which he has moved so comfortably and productively have even more to learn about him.

So we decided that we would make it our task not only to prepare the volume, but also to write a sketch of Schmalstieg the scholar, and to inform the readers of this volume about a life dedicated to learning, teaching, and discovering essential facts about languages and language in general. Given Bill's famous reluctance to talk about himself, we realized that to do this, there was really only one way to gather the facts, and that was through an interview. This would normally be simple enough, but in the case of a Festschrift, there was a definite disadvantage and that was that Bill would have to be told about the volume we were preparing. Besides, we were afraid, and rightly so, that the secret might have been revealed to him by a well-intentioned contributor to the Festschrift, and we wanted to make sure that if he knew about this tribute, he would hear about it and have it confirmed by us (it was also the only way we knew to get a copy of his publication list). So Baldi made an appointment to visit Bill at his home in State College one afternoon in the Fall of 2002, and Dini arranged to make a telephone call to the house during the time Baldi was there. Characteristically, Bill failed to see the connection between Dini's call

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and Baldi's visit at first, but it was in this way, transatlantically and more or less together, that the editors of this volume announced the Festschrift to a grateful and visibly pleased Bill Schmalstieg.

The biographical career sketch which follows results from two face-to-face recorded interviews conducted by Baldi. Baldi collected the information and wrote the piece, with Dini's assistance. Given our novice status as reporters and biographers, we agreed to Bill's suggestion that he be permitted to see the sketch before it was published, if only to guarantee the accuracy of the facts. In this we were only too happy to oblige: Bill's legendary status as a proofreader might as well be put to good use. We only wish we could have asked him to proofread the contents of this volume, but that seemed a bit too much!

William Riegel Schmalstieg was born on October 3, 1929, in Sayre, Pennsylvania, the only child of John William and Dorothy Augusta Riegel Schmalstieg. Bill's father was a Episcopal clergyman in Athens, Pa. When he was a young first-grader his family moved to Easton, Pa., and from there soon after to Minersville, Pa. While he was still in the second grade, Bill's family moved west to Vermillion, South Dakota, where his father took another pastoral position. The moves were sudden but seemed to be taken in stride by this hearty and adventurous family. Bill attended three different schools in the second grade, an index of the unsettled nature of those early years. While he was in Vermillion, during the 7th grade, Bill received his first lessons in a foreign language from his father, who had been a student of the Classics before entering the seminary, where he also studied Hebrew. Bill's father prided himself on his knowledge of English grammar as well as the Classics, all of which he shared with Bill during weekend Latin lessons. Learning Latin was a forgettable and unsuccessful experience for Bill, who wanted to be outside playing rather than learning paradigms. The family lived in Vermillion for about seven years until the outbreak of World War II, when, concerned for Bill's maternal grandparents living in Easton, they moved back east while Bill was in the 9th grade. At this time his father assumed another ministerial position in Lewisburg, Pa., coincidentally not far from Bill's eventual home in State College. (For those unfamiliar with Pennsylvania geography, all of the towns where Bill lived were in the northeastern or central part of the state.) But the lure of the West was great for Bill's father, and within two years, while Bill was in the 11th grade, the family moved west again, this time to St. Paul, Minnesota. One of the family's primary motivations for moving to Minnesota was the availability of a high-quality public education at a reasonable cost at the University of Minnesota, which Bill eventually attended. On arrival in Minnesota, Bill enrolled in the Breck School, a private Episcopal military boys' high school, from which he graduated in 1946. Breck School made a solidly positive impression on the diligent and serious

young Schmalstieg, and he considered it far superior to the public schools he had attended in Pennsylvania. At the University of Minnesota he resumed his study of French, which he had taken in high school; his language-learning experiences were more successful this time than they were in the 7th grade.

Despite his eventual proficiency at learning languages, Bill had had no exposure to a foreign language when he was growing up. His family was made up of people of German, Dutch, and Pennsylvania Dutch (German) origin, but apart from a few standard expressions in Pennsylvania Dutch which he heard from his grandparents, there was absolutely no culture of foreign language maintenance in his family.

Bill acknowledges his father's profound influence on his decision to study languages. By the time he began his undergraduate studies at Minnesota in 1946, the Soviet Union looked more and more like a threat to the United States. Under his father's advice, Bill began to study Russian so that he would be skilled in the language in case of a war, which his father believed was in the future. At Minnesota, Bill continued his Russian studies in the context of a largely self-styled linguistics degree, which included a year of Arabic to satisfy a degree requirement for a non–Indo-European language. Bill and Charles Fillmore, with whom he attended several classes, were the first two BA graduates in linguistics at the University of Minnesota (1950). He admits that his motivation for taking a degree in linguistics at Minnesota was the fact that there was no major in Russian available, although the major in linguistics had only one course, an introduction in which Bloomfield's *Language* was the text. Bill's interest in linguistics remained secondary to his interest in Russian, though his French was good enough that he actually received an offer from the US State Department for a position as a French translator, a position he declined because of his academic aspirations.

After Bill's graduation from Minnesota, the family moved to New Hampshire, and he began his graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, in the Department of Baltic and Slavic Languages. His education at Penn was initially supported by members of one of his father's Pennsylvania churches. He earned his Master's degree in 1951. While a first-year student, Bill took courses in "Native Peoples of the Soviet Union", Old Prussian (his first Baltic language), Russian, Bulgarian, and Arabic. Such was Bill's entrée into the Baltic field: he started out at Pennsylvania to concentrate on Russian, but found himself in a department, one of the few if not the only one, which also offered a program of study in Baltic.

After completing his MA, Bill transferred to Columbia University in New York for a year (1951–1952), where he enrolled in the Department of Linguistics. He studied with André Martinet, whom Bill remembers as an inspiring and

creative teacher whom he still admires to this day (despite a falling-out over a mildly critical remark made by Bill in an unpublished review of Martinet's *Des steppes aux océans*). Martinet introduced Bill to historical and Prague School linguistics, combining the two in a way that was to remain with Bill throughout his career. He also studied "Languages in Contact" with Martinet during the period that Uriel Weinreich and William Diver were active in the Columbia Linguistics Department. It is noteworthy that Bill wrote a fieldwork-based paper for this course on the French of Berlin, New Hampshire, where his parents still lived, noteworthy because it showed that by this time Bill was completely drawn into linguistics as a way of approaching the study of languages. He credits Martinet and the Prague School as the major intellectual influences of the period.

Before he could finish the year at Columbia, Bill was called for military service, serving as an officer on active duty during the Korean War. He was assigned to an Army camp in Maryland, not far from Washington, D.C., where he took tests in Russian, Bulgarian, and Arabic, and was ultimately posted for nearly two years at the National Security Agency in the Washington area, where he taught Slavic languages.

After military service, Bill returned to Pennsylvania for his PhD, supported in part by the GI Bill and also by a University scholarship. By this time, Bill was married (to Emily Botdorf) with one daughter (Linda), and they lived a comfortable student existence on these funds, supplemented by jobs in the university library and other occasional sources. It was at this time that Bill came to be influenced by two figures who would remain dominant in his intellectual formation, Alfred Senn and his student from Kaunas, Antanas Salys, two dominant figures in Baltic linguistics. And although he continued some work in Slavic linguistics and Old Church Slavonic (with Salys), by this time Bill's interests had switched almost entirely to Baltic. He considers Salys to have been the primary intellectual force in his education at Pennsylvania, though Senn was the senior professor and the head of the department.

It is certainly no coincidence, given Bill's European orientation, that almost all of his graduate school professors were trained in Europe: Martinet, Senn, Salys, and Henry Hoenigswald, with whom he studied Indo-European linguistics and who had a great influence on Bill's scholarly outlook. Interestingly, apart from Hoenigswald's course in Indo-European linguistics, all of Bill's linguistic studies were done in the context of Baltic and Slavic; he did not take courses from Zellig Harris, Harry Hiż, or any of the other general linguists at the university at that time. Bill's interest in Baltic was further strengthened by the small but tight community of students, among whom were several native speakers of Lithuanian with whom Bill and fellow American friend Sam Levin

got to practice their spoken Lithuanian, most notably Kostas Ostrauskas, Vincas Macišunas, and Bill's lifelong friend Tony Klimas, all forming what they called "The Lithuanian Patriots Club", whose motto was "Chicago today, the world tomorrow". Bill finished his PhD in 1956 with a dissertation on the influence of the Slavic languages on Lithuanian, supervised by Senn (Salys served as a member of the committee). He pursued a teaching career straightaway (over a sure position with the National Security Agency), partly because he wanted to teach, but even more because he wanted to pursue his developing research agenda in historical, Baltic, and Slavic linguistics.

Bill's first academic position was in the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Kentucky, a one year position which he won in 1956 without the traditional formal campus interview; he accepted the position without ever having seen the university. His duties included courses in Russian, French, the history of the German language, and even a general literature course in Humanities in which he taught Romanticism, including works by Ovid, Cyrano de Bergerac, and other Romantic authors. Despite the distance of these humanities readings from his language/linguistics training, Bill taught them with great success (as evidenced by his renewal at the university), and of course he was a success as well in his French and Russian classes, which came quite easy to him. During his three-year tenure at Kentucky, Bill became involved (initially as treasurer) with *General Linguistics*, which was founded by John Rea in 1955. Of course *General Linguistics* eventually came to Penn State with the Slavicist Thomas Magner as editor and Bill as book review editor, beginning with volume 7, in 1967. Bill became the editor with volume 11 in 1971, a position he held until 1991, when he turned the journal over to Ernst Ebbinghaus, who edited or co-edited it from 1992 until his death in 1995.[1]

In 1959, Bill accepted an offer from the Department of Modern Languages at Lafayette College, a well-regarded liberal arts college in Easton, Pa. This position not only took Bill back to his northeastern roots, but all the way back to the very area of Pennsylvania in which he had partly grown up. At Lafayette he taught mainly Russian and French but also had an opportunity to teach historical linguistics. He spent four comfortable years at Lafayette, and in 1963 he received an offer from the Department of Slavic and Oriental Languages at the

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[1] Baldi had the privilege of working on *General Linguistics*, initially as review editor and later as co-editor, where he had the opportunity to encounter firsthand Bill's titanic memory and editorial acumen. Lucky was the author who submitted an article for publication in *General Linguistics*: accepted or not, each piece was returned to the author with missing macrons, nasal hooks, and other diacritical and philological minutiae supplied for future publication. *General Linguistics* was still being published by Pegasus Press in 2004 under the editorship of Carol Justus of the University of Texas, Austin.

University of Minnesota, his alma mater. He spent one disastrous year at Minnesota, a year which was marked by departmental strife, interpersonal conflict, and a general sense of tension and unhappiness. Anyone who knows Bill Schmalstieg knows that if there is a single identifying characteristic of his personality it is his avoidance of conflict and tension-laden situations, especially in face-to-face circumstances.[2] Although he managed to avoid personal involvement in the departmental mess around him, he was anxious to extract himself from the institutional unpleasantness of the Minnesota department, and when by chance a position became available in the Department of Slavic Languages at Penn State University, chaired at the time by Thomas Magner, Bill did not hesitate to accept it, assuming the position of Associate Professor of Slavic Languages in 1964. It would be his final academic move; he was happy to be in a department of Slavic languages and to avoid the tensions which a department offering many languages, such as the one at Minnesota, tended to foster.

Within a year after Bill's arrival at Penn State, Magner took a leave in Yugoslavia, and Bill was appointed Acting Head of the department. He remained Acting Head for four years (Magner became Associate Dean) and was eventually appointed as permanent Head of the department in 1969, a position he held until 1991.

Bill continued his full teaching schedule despite his administrative duties, concentrating mainly on Slavic linguistics, Russian, Old Church Slavonic, and even courses in Baltic languages and linguistics, primarily Lithuanian. In those days he taught Lithuanian using mimeographed manuscript pages of his book *An Introduction to Modern Lithuanian*, written with A. Klimas and L. Dambriūnas (**B1**). Bill was forceful in his defense of courses in Baltic to the Department of Slavic at Penn State, arguing then, as now, that Baltic languages constitute an indispensable part of training in Slavic linguistics.

Bill was a highly successful and popular teacher, both in his language classes and in his linguistics classes. He sums up his philosophy of teaching as follows: make everything as simple as possible. This philosophy is also a hallmark of the many grammars Bill has authored or translated, in which terminology is always defined, arguments are carefully illustrated, and examples are always glossed and translated for prospective users, student and non-student alike. In this regard he is the most scholarly of teachers, adhering to the principle that difficult subject matter should not be avoided, but just properly

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[2] Of course, Bill's desire to avoid conflict has its own limits, especially as regards certain scholarly issues which come close to his intellectual self-definition. See for example his methodological reactions in the *Journal of Indo-European Studies* in 1983 (**114**) [boldface numerals refer to entries in the accompanying bibliography]; see also *Baltistica* 34 for another failed methodological commentary on Schmalstieg's approach.

explained.

During the first decades of Bill's career, he devoted nearly all of his research time to matters of Slavic and Baltic linguistics. Bill's publication list is dense with books and articles on Lithuanian, Old Church Slavonic, the comparative grammar of Baltic languages, and the like, reflecting his intensive training in these subjects and his own preoccupation with *res balticae et slavicae*. In the early 1970s, Bill began to shift part of his attention to other areas as well, most notably Indo-European, not only in its relation to Baltic and Slavic (which had always been a focal point), but also as a field of inquiry unto itself. Beginning around 1973 (**68**, **69**, **71**), one can detect a noticeable broadening of Bill's target research area into general issues of Indo-European phonology, morphology, and, later, syntax. This is noteworthy for several reasons, but the main one is that as a student Bill's formal education in Indo-European was somewhat limited, and he had certainly not had an extensive training regimen in the ancient languages which underlie much of Indo-European research.[3] Furthermore, it bears repeating that Bill was not trained as a general linguist, but rather as a Balticist and Slavicist, with most of his theoretical apparatus drawn from the Prague School approach advocated by Martinet. Apart from the Baltic and Slavic languages, his only other directed study of ancient Indo-European languages was in Latin and in Sanskrit for one year. In all other languages, including Greek and Hittite, he was completely autodidactic.[4] Bill explains that while Indo-European issues had always been on his mind, he nonetheless felt that he lacked the background to conduct original research in this field. But over the years he read and studied to the point that he was sufficiently confident to begin asserting his position, and in 1980 he produced a major work, *Indo-European Linguistics: A New Synthesis* (**B12**), in which he laid out the foundations of much of what would occupy him in the area of Indo-European linguistics for the next twenty years.

Bill's work has always been characterized by several traits, noteworthy perhaps because they are not always to be found in work on historical linguistics. They are imagination, speculation, and philological accuracy. On more than one occasion he has diverged from the traditional wisdom on some point, major or minor, in the history of Indo-European languages, including Baltic and Slavic.

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[3] Bill is not reluctant to expresses his admiration for early language training in Europe and the obvious benefits this has for young students who become interested in Indo-European linguistics, a benefit not enjoyed by similarly-minded students in North America.

[4] And not only in matters of Indo-European philology and methodology was he an autodidact. He once lamented the loss of an entire summer reading and studying Chomsky and Halle's *The Sound Pattern of English*, rough going for anyone without special instruction and training, and soon after its publication a footnote, albeit a major one, in the history of linguistics.

He attributes his frequently non-traditional approach to the history of the Indo-European languages, and the internal prehistory of Proto-Indo-European itself, to the Prague School training he received under Martinet when Bill was a student at Columbia. His insistence on dealing with linguistic facts as parts of systems marks all of his work. He has never subscribed to the theory-neutral Brugmann-derived approach to structural matters, which may in part explain why Bill has generally not engaged in etymological research. He has, on the contrary, typically dedicated his efforts to large-scale problems of phonological, morphological, or syntactic systems, never losing sight of the integrated nature of languages and what he views as the methodological atomism inherent in dealing with isolated, non-systematized phenomena in the history of languages. He is especially dedicated to this paradigm in his work on Baltic and Slavic linguistics, in which he laments a general absence of Prague School theory as the discipline is practiced to this day. Bill is quick to point out that the widely respected work of William Labov has its roots in the Prague School, passing from Martinet to Weinreich to Labov. Bill is also dedicated to the principle that speculation in scientific research is worthy of reward, not criticism, provided that it is done in a manner that is responsible and faithful to the facts of language. "All life is speculation", he says. His speculative spirit has animated his work in Baltic and Slavic as well as Indo-European linguistics. He insists that any theory can and should be questioned, and that there is nothing sacred or certain in theories, or for that matter in life. He is decidedly agnostic on the matter of the superiority of one theory over another, arguing that no scientific theory, but in this case linguistic theory, is on an unshakable basis, and is, furthermore, subject to trends and fashion. At the same time Bill has injected his work with great imagination, a quality which he finds lacking in much historical linguistics. Unlike many Indo-European scholars, for example, he finds Greenberg's work on mass comparison, and the work of the Nostraticists and other long-range reconstructionists, to be imaginative, and while he remains agnostic on the central issues, he applauds the effort and the imagination that accompanies this program.

Bill is uncomfortable with the idea that he has had a "tripartite" career made up of the separate fields of Baltic, Slavic, and Indo-European linguistics. For him, on the contrary, these three academic areas constitute an integrated whole in which there is a consistency of goals, outlook, and methodology. When pressed about accomplishments in each field, Bill allows that he is vastly proud of his work on Lithuanian syntax (recapitulated in *A Lithuanian Historical Syntax*, **B15**), though he hastens to add that there is much now that he would change if he were to do this summary treatment over. He is also proud of his book on Baltic verb morphology (*The Historical Morphology of the Baltic Verb*, **B19**),

which elaborates and refines in admirable detail many of the themes and ideas which have been of interest to Bill from the beginning. On the Slavic side of things, Bill feels that he has made what will prove to be lasting contributions at both the level of micro-research problems, and especially at the level of the historical grammars he has written of Old Church Slavic (*An Introduction to Old Church Slavic*, 1st and 2nd editions, **B9**, **B13**), which is widely used in North American universities, and the more specialized Old Russian (**B18**). Bill's legacy in Slavic will certainly reflect the same qualities as those in Baltic: imagination, speculation, precision.

Bill's activity in the field of Baltic Studies is characterized by a focus on Old Prussian and Lithuanian. As happens with many Balticists, Latvian studies have remained on the periphery of Bill's intellectual horizons. While it is true that Bill's Baltic interests have been mainly dedicated to the investigation of Lithuanian, he is also renowned for his important publications on Old Prussian. The idea that behind the graphic variety of the Old Prussian monuments one can find a language with a phonology and a morphology not very different from East Baltic is laid out in one of his early books, *An Old Prussian Grammar* (**B8**), a work which evoked respect for the previous tradition and which engendered a discussion—still alive at present—as to what extant one can apply Labov's structural principles of language change in progress to a language like Old Prussian. This book, which appeared exactly thirty years after the German translation of Jānis Endzelīns' *Altpreussische Grammatik* (1944), has become a modern reference tool in the field of Prussian Studies. Bill's other important book on Old Prussian is *Studies in Old Prussian* (**B10**). This work is often consulted by scholars not only for its basic insights, but also for its richness of detail and its extensive bibliography. It is the hope of all practicing Balticists that the update of his *Studies in Old Prussian* currently in preparation, which is to include a critical review of Old Prussian Studies since 1976, will appear soon.

A large number of Bill's scholarly papers deal with Lithuanian. For some time, Bill's main interest in Lithuanian has been its historical syntax. In studying and analyzing Lithuanian syntax, Bill has found that the facts of the Baltic languages support his general conception of IE syntax. Another work on Lithuanian, which might be overlooked as a minor publication but whose importance should not be underestimated, is Bill's *Introduction to Modern Lithuanian* (**B1**), already noted above. This book, written together with A. Klimas and L. Dambriūnas, has served Balticists and those needing to become acquainted with the facts of a Baltic language for many generations. It was first published in 1966 and was reissued several times after that (1970, 1975, 1982, 1990) until 1999, when it appeared under another title. With the restoration of the sovereignty of

the Baltic republics, many new and updated handbooks have been published for students of Lithuanian and Latvian. For this reason the *Introduction* is used somewhat less today than in previous years, and has aged, albeit gracefully, in the nearly forty years since it first appeared. But it is important to underline the fact that this book defined introductory Lithuanian studies for several generations. Indeed, for many decades it was the sole book a foreign linguist could really use for self-instruction in Lithuanian.

There are two research efforts in Bill's Indo-European work of which he is especially proud. The first is his theory of Indo-European monophthongization, first outlined in his 1973 article "New Thoughts on Indo-European Phonology" (**69**), which he advanced as an alternative to received laryngeal accounts. He continued the monophthongization program in his 1980 book *Indo-European Linguistics: A New Synthesis* (**B12**), and in various other venues in the ensuing years (e.g. **144**). Of all of his work on Indo-European, Bill is most convinced by this theory, to which he holds steadfastly.[5] A study of this theory reveals its underlying consistency with Bill's fundamental Prague School orientation about structure and system. The second research area of which Bill remains strongly convinced is his theory of split ergativity for Proto-Indo-European, which he hinted at in his 1980 book *Indo-European Linguistics: A New Synthesis* (**B12**). This notion, which takes into account the nominative-accusative and ergative traits of Proto-Indo-European, has infused much of his research on Indo-European syntax, playing a prominent role in his analysis of Proto-Indo-European voice distinctions, case selection, and transitivity relations. Bill developed most of his thinking on ergativity while on leave at the University of Freiburg in 1978–1979. His willingness to compare his reconstructed system with those found in other languages, even non–Indo-European ones (Georgian in this case), underscores his tendency to accept typological parallels as a useful heuristic, though he remains dubious (consistently so) about the existence of linguistic universals.

As of this writing (January 2004), Bill is happily retired from the daily life of the university, though not from his involvement in the scholarly and intellectual matters which have occupied him for more than 50 years. While he rarely visits the university, he avails himself of his magnificent personal library and maintains constant conventional and electronic contact with his many friends and colleagues in the US and Europe. Around walks and daily visits to the bagel shop with his wife Emily, and visits to his daughters Linda and Roxanne and

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[5] Lest one get the impression that Bill is inflexibly attached to previous work, it should be pointed out that he now disavows most of the morphology and syntax in his 1980 book, but still believes that the phonology is right.

grandchildren, Bill continues to invest himself in scholarly discourse and achievement, reviewing books, addressing problems of Baltic phonology (specifically that of the Jatvingian Vocabulary reported on by Zinkevičius), and most significantly, the update of his 1976 *Studies in Old Prussian* (**B10**). At this date he has written several hundred pages in his review of the literature alone.

Bill Schmalstieg is a gentle, polite, unassuming Titan who has inspired and provoked generations of students and scholars of historical, Baltic, Slavic, and Indo-European linguistics. It has been our privilege to know him, to benefit from his wisdom, and to profit from his incredible scholarly depth. We are pleased and honored for the opportunity to present this Festschrift to him as a token of our respect, our admiration, and most of all, our friendship.