

***A CSEH SZAK 50 ÉVE (1955–2005)*  
(50 years of the Czech Department  
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pp.**

The book *A cseh szak 50 éve (1955–2005)* (50 Years of the Czech Department 1955–2005) contains the proceedings from a conference held on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of November, 2005. The conference was organized to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Czech Department in the Department of Slavic Philology at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary. Scholars from four European countries took part, including Professor František Čermák from Charles University in Prague, the head of the Institute of the Czech National Corpus, Professor Richard Pražák, translator, diplomat and literary scholar from Masaryk University, who has devoted his life to building close relations between the Czech Republic and Hungary for over 50 years, scholars from the University of Ostrava, the University of Vienna, the University of Kiev, as well as academics from the Hungarian universities of Szeged, Piliscaba, and of course scholars from Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest.

Because of the broad variety of topics, research methods and points of view presented at the conference, it would be difficult to analyze in detail all the contributions. Thus I will discuss only a few of them in depth and merely touch upon others. Besides the gain in scholarship, one of the biggest benefits issuing from the conference was that the scholars were given an opportunity to present their opinions to a broader, international audience and discuss questions of Czech culture and literature. Such

meetings always encourage the expression of new ideas and inspire original interpretations and reinterpretations of texts and cultural phenomena.

The book is divided into three parts according to subject.

1. The first part presents the history of Czech studies at three universities located in Budapest, Vienna and Kiev.

The introductory study by Veronika Heé familiarizes the reader with the development of Czech Studies in Budapest. Even though mutual interest in Czech and Hungarian history and culture existed previously, it was not until the end of the Second World War that this process acquired concrete form in Hungarian translations of Czech literary classics by authors such as Božena Němcová and Karel Čapek. In 1955 the Czech Department in the Department of Slavic Philology was established. The Study of Slavic Languages has existed at Eötvös Loránd University since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and between 1879 and 1919 the first Hungarian Slavist, Oszkár Asbóth, worked there. Aszbóth was the first scholar to research Hungarian words borrowed from Slavic languages. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Department of Croatian and Slovak Studies was founded; Czech and Bulgar Studies had to wait until the 1950s and Polish Studies until the 1970s. Veronika Heé claims László Dobossy is the most influential Hungarian Slavist. He worked to develop the Czech Department and is the author of several volumes devoted to Czech literature, for example a monograph on Karel Čapek, publications on Jaroslav Hašek, and above all, his *Czech-Hungarian Dictionary*, which, although published nearly 50 years ago, is still in use and has assisted generations of translators, teachers and students in their study of

Czech language and literature. Upon professor Dobossy's retirement, his student Veronika Heé, along with Ludmila Hankó, took over the teaching of Czech literature. Together they wrote *The History of Czech Literature* (2003) – a much needed reference work for students of Czech language and literature. The other scholar at the department, a linguist, is Oleg Fedoszov, a native Russian, who graduated from Charles University. The author of the study goes on to mention Czech lecturers and graduates of the Czech Department who have worked as translators, teachers and diplomats and have participated in the consolidation of Hungarian-Czech relations in culture and many other fields.

The next study, *The Beginnings of Viennese Czech Studies in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and their Relations to Hungarian Studies (For the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Establishment of Czech Studies in Budapest)*, written by Stefan Michael Newerkla from the University of Vienna, primarily treats the work of Jan Václav Pohl, one of the first professional teachers of Czech in the Hapsburg Monarchy and the author of a handbook of Czech grammar. He worked in the Collegium Theresianum, a military academy, and was the teacher of the emperor's family. Pohl tried to create new rules for Czech orthography and translated a Jesuit catechism. Pohl's friend János Farkas translated the book into Hungarian. It is highly probable that he was inspired by Pohl's conceptions while writing his own Hungarian grammar textbook. Pohl's efforts were not clearly understood by his contemporaries, and it was due to the indirect efforts of Josef Dobrovský that Pohl's voluminous German-Czech-Latin dictionary never saw publication. The study draws attention to lesser-known

aspects of the Czech National Revival and spells out the significance of private sympathies in the development of science and culture by examining the connections between Pohl and Farkas and Pohl and Dobrovský.

In her contribution, Olga Palamarčuk, head of the Department of Czech Studies at the University of Kiev, writes about her home department, which was established in 1842. The institution played an important role in the enrichment of Ukrainian-Czech intercultural and academic contacts. She also addresses events during an exceedingly tragic period of Ukrainian scholarship in the 20s and the 30s when Stalin sent nearly all Ukrainian Slavists to concentration camps. After the Second World War, Slavic Studies underwent major reorganization, initiated primarily by L. Bulachovský. Pomarčuk describes the entire structure of the Department of Czech Studies and the system of education. The importance of the study lies especially in its collocation with the study on Hungarian Slavic Studies.

All three studies are valuable from a historic point of view. They demonstrate three ways of developing Slavic studies in three different regions – Central Europe (Budapest), the West (Vienna) and the East (Kiev). By pointing to the most influential scholars, they show how young academics should work and demonstrate the need for continual cooperation between nations. On the other hand, all three studies remind us of nearly forgotten figures, enabling us to see the issue of Czech Studies in a wider context. Naturally, an even broader context would have been welcome, and perhaps in the future a similar yet more encompassing conference could be organized.

2. The second part of the collection, *Language and Linguistics*, contains four studies concerning linguistic topics from several points of view. It provides a general overview of the modern Czech language. Especially helpful is the demonstration of the variety of research methods and the discussion of the matter of language, which is shown as a social entity. Research methods, language and linguistic questions are demonstrated from the point of view of prominent individuals and presented using comparative aspects.

Anna Benešová presents the general context of the Czech language in her study *The Czech Language in the European Union*. František Čermák focuses on modern methods of language research in *The Czech National Corpus* (<http://UCNK.FF.CUNI.CZ> *The Current Situation* (2005)), which deals with the project's evolution beginning in 1994. In his study, *Vladimír Skalička and Hungarian Grammar* Oleg Fedoszov reminds us of an admirer of Hungarian culture and an extremely influential figure in the development of Czech-Hungarian relations. Skalička was one of the most prominent Czech scholars in the field of Hungarian Studies at Charles University and an important practitioner of Prague structuralism. Fedoszov focuses on his academic contributions, for example those on Hungarian grammar, and briefly sums up his achievements, which are still influential in the field of linguistics. In the final study in this section, *Comparative Analysis of Czech and Hungarian Linguistic Associations*, Gábor Szelmeczi examines materials from two language experiments that took place in 1983 (Hungarian) and in 1988 (Czech). By comparing the results of the reactions to 56 pairs of words, he demonstrates common tendencies in the

usage of antonyms, synonyms and other language elements.

3. The third and final section, *Literature and Cultural History*, is the longest and most heterogeneous. It comprises ten studies, which suggests that questions of culture and literature are still perhaps the most attractive for researchers. The first group of studies treats significant figures responsible for the constant evolution in relations between the two nations. The study *In Memory of László Dobossy and Scholarship on Czech-Hungarian Relations* by István Fried is devoted to the life and work of this prominent Hungarian scholar. Although he worked for almost 25 years as a professor of Czech literature, his horizon of interests was exceedingly broad – he began his academic career researching French literature, but in the 50s turned to Slavic Studies, especially Czech literature. At the centre of the interests of this extremely influential pedagogue was primarily the literary heritage of Karel Čapek and Jaroslav Hašek. Secondly, Dobossy examined general questions of Czech-Hungarian cultural relations. He is also the author of an excellent Hungarian translation of Komenský's *Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart* and an expert on Komenský's literary production in general. Fried's study is significant from a historical point of view and presents many facts that were previously not well known. The second study from this area is *The Contribution of the Translational Works of František Brábek and the Collection of World Poetry to an Acquaintance with Hungarian Poetry of the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* by Petr Hora. The "Collection of World Poetry" played an important role in the evolution of Czech poetry and familiarized the Czechs with new directions in

world poetry. Brábek, who spent his childhood in Hungary, was an expert in Hungarian language and culture and thus translated original texts himself, which was extremely rare in the case of a Hungarian. He worked with Jaroslav Vrchlický, and the results of this partnership were three books of Hungarian poetry in Czech, among them the literary works of Hungary's national poet Sándor Petőfi. The purpose of the collection was to acquaint readers with new ideas and international culture and what Brábek achieved for Hungarian poetry. Hora analyses Brábek's translations and points out the most distinctive features of the poetics of the Lumír School.

The next section is devoted to questions of modern Czech literature and culture. Iva Málková in her study *Czech Poetry at the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* examines the modern poetry scene, especially in Ostrava. She also notes new cultural tendencies such as poems published on the Internet. In his study devoted to Czech cinematography, *The Preservation of Values and Renewal*, László Kovács also surveys new tendencies in Czech culture. He tries to explain how Czech cinematography successfully dealt with political changes during and after 1989 and offers a brief overview of the most important films from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century until today. In her study, *The Meaning of Literature for Children*, Andrea Balázs compares the results of research in the field of literature written for children in Czech and Hungarian scholarship. Ludmila B. Hankó, in her contribution, *Collateral Fatelessness (Imre Kertész and Arnošt Lustig: A Comparison of Their Books "Fatelessness" and "From the Diary of Seventeen-Year-Old Perla Ch.")* focuses on the metaphorical

and philosophical significance of the term *fatefulness*, the primary topic of Kertész's novel and one that also appears in Lustig's book. This term can be understood as the destiny of the entire war generation, not only Jews, whose lives and fates were forcibly and permanently altered. A related term, *fatelessness*, connotes the inability to decide one's own life and the loss of individuality. Both texts are filled with parallels – both heroes prematurely grow up, and they are conscious of their tragic situations. The texts are also similar in their autobiographical backgrounds – both Kertész and Lustig themselves were prisoners in Nazi concentration camps. The study shows and emphasizes the similarity of the cruel experiences of the generation that lived in Central Europe during the Second World War. These tragic times recall Efraim Israel's text *The Nation That Does Not Want to Belong to Itself*, an article devoted to Eduard Beneš and his status in the history of Czechoslovakia.

The next study, *Hungarian Aspects of The Czech National Revival* by Richard Pražák, concentrates on the cultural and political aspects of Czech-Hungarian relations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The author highlights the mutual influence between these two nations and draws attention to the similar character of Jungmann's and Kazinczy's revivalist conceptions. Hungarian influence was present in all phases of the Czech National Revival, and Pražák follows the transformations of this influence. The next study, *From Complaining Hungary to Complaining Slavia* by Róbert Kiss Szemán, is devoted to questions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The study deals with Jan Kollár's most significant poem, *Slávy dcera*, and concentrates on a single motif – the figure of Complaining Slavia.

He relates this motif to the figure of Querela Hungairae, which was often present in Hungarian literature from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Kollár, who knew this topos from lectures on Hungarian poems in Latin, used it in his Latin-language didactic poem and later reinterpreted it in his *Slávy dcera*. The study offers a new perspective on interpretations of Kollár's poetry and will surely inspire further research. Significant poets are also the subject of the study *The Differences in "Great Poems" in Czech and Hungarian Poetry* by István Vörös. The author describes two great figures from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Karel Hynek Mácha and Mihály Vörösmarty, who both had considerable influence on the development of "great poems." Both poets inspired others and encouraged the creation of national poetry. The most typical feature of Mácha's literary production was the use of oxymoron, which is seen throughout Czech poetry of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Metaphor plays a similar role in Vörösmarty's works as oxymoron does in Mácha's poetry, for example, in the works of Attila József, János Pilinszky and László Nagy.

The variety of comparative viewpoints represented in this collection offers an extensive overview of Czech and Hungarian cultural and literary studies. As this collection demonstrates, the comparative method has the ability to enrich national scholarship with a context that other types of scholarship cannot. Old topics are suddenly seen in a new context, a new light, and from a different point of view. In most cases texts are intended to create mutual understanding and complement one another not only regarding the subject matter, but also the general issue of Czech-Hungarian relations. The one article that seems to fall out of this

category is that by Efraim Israel, which is more polemical in nature. His contribution, which was originally published in the Internet newspaper *Britské listy*, is more openly emotional and subjective and without the scholarly apparatus typical of this collection. Although it is not without interest, it would certainly be more appropriate and find perhaps a greater readership in a different forum.

The studies are written either in Czech or in Hungarian, and only the first one by Veronika Heé has two versions. From a practical point of view, it would be better if every study had its counterpart in the other language and thus be accessible to more readers. Brief resumes are of course useful, but they cannot replace the full article.

This collection of essays is recommended primarily to anyone interested in Czech-Hungarian relations. It provides useful, previously little-known information and opens up new avenues of interpretation. It will certainly inspire other scholars, teachers and students. Apart from its pure scholarly value, however, the book demonstrates how two nations with different roots and different histories are able to cooperate and enrich each other culturally. Academia is conventionally seen as an exclusive world isolated from current and pressing issues of the present day, but this conference and this collection show how not only scholars, but students, writers, teachers and diplomats can learn from the experiences of previous generations and other cultures.

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