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Jaroslav Ondráček

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JAROSLAV ONDRÁČEK



PhDr. Jaroslav Ondráček, CSc., senior lecturer in the Department of English and American Studies, died on 9 September, 1984. He was 54.

Jaroslav Ondráček was born in Nové Město na Moravě on 18 November, 1929. Even before attending primary school he showed a great talent for music. The first instrument he played was an accor-

dion. As a pupil of the primary school and of the gymnasium in Nové Město he played the violin and performed at every school gathering or ceremony. At the end of his secondary education, he had to choose between music, which he would study at a conservatory, and languages, which he would study at a university. Eventually, after discussing the matter with his future wife, he decided on languages. Thus in 1949 he became a student of English and Italian at the Faculty of Arts of Brno University.

English was not taught at the gymnasium in Nové Město when Jaroslav Ondráček was a pupil there – in fact, it was taught at very few schools of this type in the country at the time, the chief foreign languages being German and French (and of course Latin); English was only available in commercial schools. He was therefore forced to learn English on his own, and his most important “teacher” was English by Radio (he was a regular listener of English by Radio and other broadcasts of the BBC throughout his whole life).

He graduated with honours in 1953 and immediately started his compulsory national service. Luckily, he was released on medical grounds after a few months. He was a very sensitive and gentle person, and arms had no place in the world as he wished it to be. In 1954 he started teaching English, but only as an external member of the Department of Languages, earning so little that he was unable to support a wife and so could not get

married. In 1962 he became member of the English Department. He received his Ph.D. in 1968 and his C.Sc. in 1973.

In both his teaching and his research, he divided his attention equally between English and Italian. In recent years he also studied and taught Finnish. He wrote a number of contrastive studies on these languages and on Czech, which appeared in *Brno studies in English*, *Philologica Pragensia* and *Časopis pro moderní filologii* (The Journal of philological studies, published in Prague). The papers reveal an unusual gift for giving a clear explanation of even the minutest details and for placing these details in a wider context. All his studies were richly documented. He was known as a perfectionist, and this also held true for him as an author. He always handed in his articles at least six months before the deadline, at a time when most of the other contributors had not even started writing their rough drafts. Another characteristic feature of Jaroslav Ondráček was his diligence. The present writer remembers him as a student in the early fifties. He felt he needed to have his own copy of Jones's textbook of phonetics, but English books were no longer being sold in the bookshops: he solved the problem by copying out the whole book by hand.

The very high standard of Jaroslav Ondráček's knowledge of foreign languages was a result of his deep knowledge of Czech, his love for his mother tongue and his ability to learn from limited sources. He drew very little support from direct contacts with native speakers in the countries concerned: during his thirty years as a university teacher he visited England twice, Italy once and Finland twice.

Turning now to his personal life, we should like to mention his idyllic and modest family life and his love for his

native town and the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands. He knew the Highland intimately from his sporting activities, especially from cross-country skiing. Besides skiing he also enjoyed swimming, skating and football. He was a faithful fan of his local football team: after he stopped playing for them, he attended all their home matches for the rest of his life and for many years travelled to all the away matches. Similarly he remained in touch with skiing: when he could not ski himself, he acted as an interpreter for Finnish and Italian cross-country skiers.

As has already been said, Jaroslav Ondráček was an excellent violinist. His colleagues and students at the English Department knew him as a sensitive guitar player and singer. His favourite composers were Smetana and Martinů. (He was not very fond of Dvořák, whose music seemed to him to be less genuinely Czech in feeling.) What is less known about Jaroslav Ondráček is the fact that he tried his hand, successfully, at painting, mostly portraits and landscapes. For a number of years he had photography as his hobby. His favourite painter was Jan Zrzavý and his favourite writer Karel Čapek. Artists from his native region should not be left unmentioned — sculptor Jan Štursa, poet Petr Kříčka and composer Jaroslav Kříčka.

Jaroslav Ondráček's premature death was a great loss not only to his family, but to everyone in the department, teachers as well students. To quote Jan Fírbas: In Jaroslav Ondráček we have lost one of the foremost students of modern English and modern Italian, the author of a number of valuable contrastive studies, an unusually accomplished teacher, a devoted and noble colleague. All the members of the department, his colleagues, friends and students, will honour his memory.