PROFESSOR HLADKÝ’S SWAN SONG

Professor Josef Hladký passed away on 5th January 2008. Let me recall the fact that the last years of his fruitful and at times very uneasy professional life were influenced by his serious illness which, unfortunately, did not allow him to show his real involvement and share the joy with the two English departments both at the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Education at Masaryk University to which he devoted much of his unique effort, professional insight and true craft. In the unending engagement with his branch of study in the last years of his career he bravely challenged his ill fate.

On the occasion of his anniversaries a number of articles was published surveying most of his scientific and pedagogical activities. I feel that the well-known facts about the rich, unique and much appreciated activities should not be reiterated in this final tribute. In my farewell message I would like to focus mainly on the sole, yet unpublished piece of work which, in my view, is very special, timeless and remarkable, not only regarding its origin but mainly in view of its special content.

The collection Vilém Mathesius. Memoirs and Other Manuscripts¹ prepared for print by Hladký as early as 2000, represents a highly topical title bringing some less familiar, or even unfamiliar facts about the personal and professional history of the leading personality of the Prague School and his extensive, surprising and remarkable activities which have remained hidden even to specialists in Mathesius’ heritage.

Josef Hladký was well-known for his profound interest in archive materials. He was also the author of the well-founded history of English studies in the Czech lands under the title ”The history and the present state of the English studies in the Czech Republic” published in the collection European English Studies: Contributions Towards the History of a Discipline (London, 2000).

In his preface to the Memoirs Josef Hladký mentions the fact that the edition of this work would have been undertaken by the late Professor Josef Vachek in connection with the edition of Jazyk, kultura a slovesnost (Language, culture and literature), published on the occasion of Mathesius’ centenary in 1982. However, at that time the project could not be materialized because of the press censorship. Moreover, it called for extensive research in the Pilsen archives. For the collection and classification of the data required for the shaping of the final text version no linguistic expert was more predestined than Josef Hladký.

The main part of the manuscript consists of eighteen chapters concerned with Mathesius’ family background, his early life in Kolin, school years, studies at Charles University in
Prague, and the beginnings of his academic career (e.g. My family, Our Kolín flats, People in Kolín, Grammar School, Holiday trips, Prague, At University, The Moravcoví family, Teaching at the Old Town Grammar School, etc.). Part II of the Memoirs has been preserved only in fragments (The War and the first paragraph of the chapter devoted to Mathesius' marriage). The contents of the other chapters can only be guessed at from their titles: My first journey to England, Pilsen, Associate professorship, Post-war hard times, The Faculty of Arts after the War, My eye disease, The Prague Linguistic Circle and international congresses, etc. Besides the memoir chapters, the manuscript contains 25 two-column pages of poems (numbering altogether seventy-nine) dating from 1892–1901. Attached to this part is a word list which explains the meaning of words no longer in current use. The memoir part of the volume is concluded by two more passages, concerned, respectively, with some features of Mathesius' character and Key moments in the history of the Czech nation. Editor's notes are introduced by Hladký's comments on the contents of the Memoirs, to which Hladký added two letters from the correspondence between the late Professor Vachek and Mathesius' son MUDr J.V. Mathesius. The manuscript closes with an index of names.

At present the Memoirs are in preparation for printing by The Karolinum Press, Charles University. The final version of the manuscript will include an introductory study by Libuše Dušková and Jan Čermák, outlining Mathesius' life and work. I cherish the hope that they will make it possible for the readers to have copies of the much expected book very soon. The book will provide new insights into the life and work of the highly recognized personality of Vilém Mathesius, a great Czech linguist, cultural thinker and literary scholar.

In conclusion, let me add with great respect and recognition that Hladký's last editorial work representing also an interpretation of Mathesius's Memoirs can be understood as a swan song Josef has rendered for the future generations of dedicated Anglicists.

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Notes

1 Paměti a jiné rukopisy. K vydání připravil Josef Hladký.