

history and sexual psychology. The volume of meticulous research and the abundance of carefully-chosen visual material are equally impressive. *Secreted Desires* is unquestionably a major contribution to the long list of academic works published by Masaryk University.

Martina Vránová

Michal Peprník: *Topos lesa v americké literatuře* [The Topos of the Forest in American Literature]. Brno: Host, 2005. 252 pp., ISBN 80-7294-153-4.

The title of Michal Peprník's study suggests a comprehensive overview of the ways in which American authors have portrayed the theme of the forest. However, even a preliminary scan of the table of contents indicates a much narrower focus. The historical period covered is mostly early American literature and the only author discussed in any depth is James Fenimore Cooper. This limitation in scope is not a problem in itself, of course, but it may cause some disappointment to readers hoping for what the title promises. The brief introduction may also be somewhat misleading. Its witty style, unencumbered by jargon and multiple explanatory footnotes, will appeal to a broad range of readers. While occasional echoes of this style do recur in the following chapters, the text quickly becomes a scholarly analysis.

Peprník's book clearly targets Czech college students and may be quite helpful as a supplementary text in introductory courses on American literature. The frequent references linking certain elements in American and Czech cultures are Peprník's most valuable contributions. They draw the Czech reader into the discussion and they allow Peprník to make interesting observations on both cultures. For instance, in a chapter on the dark Puritan forest, Peprník contextualizes the contemporary violence between the Puritans and the indigenous population by reminding the reader that "zhruba v téže době na Prašné bráně viselo daleko více hlav a nebyly to hlavy 'krvežíznivých divochů'" [at about the same time many more bodies hung from the scaffolds in front of the Powder Tower in Prague and these were not bodies of 'blood-thirsty savages'] (53). Peprník's unorthodox references to Czech fairy-tales, often integrated into a rigorous academic definition of some abstract concept, are also refreshing and fitting. Perhaps most significantly, Peprník offers several unexpected, highly illuminating parallels between particular works of American and Czech literature. His comparison of Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" and Karel Jaromír Erben's "Polednice" is especially revealing (199). Therefore, even if in some passages Peprník's unique commentary is overshadowed by concise summaries of established interpretations of canonical texts, his specific version of a Czech perspective on American literature offers numerous bright moments of surprising and delightful cross-cultural insight.

Kateřina Prajznerová

Zdeněk Stříbrný: *Proud času. Stati o Shakespearovi* [The Flow of Time. Essays on Shakespeare], Praha: Karolinum 2005, 407 pp., ISBN 80-246-1018-3.

Conceived as a cross-section of the author's scholarly interests and achievement, the volume was planned to mark Professor Zdeněk Stříbrný's eightieth birthday and the almost sixty years of his academic career in English studies. When he embarked on it in the postwar 1940s, he had two generations of Czech specialists on English philology to lean on – the founding fathers of English studies in Czech universities, Vilém Mathesius, Bohumil Trnka, Otakar Vočadlo and Zdeněk Vančura – whose guidance he acknowledged and in whose tradition he continued. The reader learns about all this from the first, memoir-like chapter of *The Flow of Time*, which comprises almost a quarter of the book and affords intimate insights into the momentous events and landmarks of Professor Stříbrný's life and work. He describes his numerous opportunities to travel and undertake research in England and the US, which proved to be of crucial importance for him, particularly in his Shakespearean studies. On his visits to English and American universities and trips to conferences he encountered, and established friendships with scholars of resounding reputation, who influenced him

whether he was in agreement, or at variance with their approaches (the latter namely in the case of Jan Kott and his novel and controversial 'Shakespeare our contemporary' theory in the 1960s). At all times Stříbrný defends his own Marxist approach while he also explains his left-wing political leanings, little changed since the 1940s despite his brush with the regime after the Prague Spring in the 1970s, and he is painfully candid about his further involvement with power as a result. It was with a great sense of justification that he was able to return to Charles University after the Velvet Revolution to make up for the years during which he was forbidden to teach and publish.

After the autobiographical introduction, there follows a selection of articles, prefaces, afterwords and reviews, but most of all book chapters from Stříbrný's major scholarly works. The purpose and success of the volume, thematically ranging from Beowulf to Martin Amis, is to show the breadth and depth of his scholarship in English literature.

The first two texts provide overviews of English literature in brief and of Middle English literature in more detail, both marked by the author's narrative talent and thus highly readable in spite of their factual richness. An abundance of factual detail also characterises the thematically narrower chapters, where it is always related to the historical background and the "flow of time". John Lyly's play *Sapho and Phao* (from a chapter in Stříbrný's book *Shakespeareovi předchůdci* [Shakespeare's Predecessors], 1965) is thus perceived in the light of the original mythological story shifting against the background of the Elizabethan court and the Queen herself, whose allegory Lyly's Sapho must become. At the same time Stříbrný identifies the piece as the first English drawing-room comedy starting a tradition pursued later by G.B. Shaw. Combining the materialist and formalist methodologies, Stříbrný then analyses the principles of Lyly's euphuism at sentence, paragraph, act and play level and traces the development of the symmetries and contrasts of euphuism across Lyly's other works.

In another chapter from the same book on Shakespeare's predecessors, Stříbrný points to the national and popular character of English Renaissance drama defying the classical dramatic unities as well as the Italian and French fashion in the dramatic production of the time, while he attributes a leading role in combining the Senecan drama with the national, home tradition to Thomas Kyd. A chapter on Christopher Marlowe gives a great deal of space to his biography, as in Stříbrný's opinion it coincides with Marlowe's titanic heroes, who unmistakably carry the imprint of Marlowe's titanic will. Here Stříbrný also contrasts Marlowe's subjectivity with what he calls Shakespeare's art of the objective.

Notwithstanding Professor Stříbrný's wide-ranging literary interests, he has always first and foremost been an ardent student of Shakespeare. It comes therefore as no surprise that 15 out of the 23 essays in the volume are devoted to him. The first comes from Stříbrný's book *William Shakespeare* (1964) and tackles the perennial question of the Bard's existence. Here, while not regarding Shakespeare's biography as important as Marlowe's, Stříbrný staunchly defends it against the skeptics of Shakespeare's authorship, his conviction never undermined by reiterating in the chapter to follow that in view of the immense range of Shakespeare's art, his private life retreats far into the background.

Stříbrný approaches Shakespeare in a celebratory manner underscored by the deep insights of his all-embracing scholarship. In a chapter on "How Shakespeare Created" followed by analysis of several plays, he foregrounds his path-breaking innovation and creative range. Yet Stříbrný, untouched by theorising, remains informative and accessible not only for the Shakespearean scholar but for the general Czech Shakespeare reader as well. At the same time he is always looking for connections to the political and material backdrop of the time, from the soaring optimism of the comedy of high Renaissance, to the 'times out of joint' of the great tragedies and the utopian vision of reconciliation and new hope of the late romances. Nevertheless, Stříbrný's humanist 'Shakespeare's-genius-for-all-time' approach predominates over his mildly Marxist historicism. As follows from articles which appeared in theatre programmes (of productions of *Othello* and *Timon of Athens*), he is also in favour of the traditional staging of Shakespeare's plays rather than modernising them, although he is not entirely dismissive of the various attempts in that they afford new possibilities of interpretation. Yet all the same, while he admits that both translations and stage productions also reflect their times, he warns against excesses in this kind of appropriation, particularly if politically biased, and, with respect to Hamlet, calls for 'the modesty of nature' to be preserved.

Stříbrný has remained consistent in his views and attitudes over the decades (some of the analyses come from the sixties, others from the late eighties and the nineties), moreover repeatedly urging the reader to read Shakespeare rather than the critic.

Besides analysis there are articles packed with interesting facts of various kinds: the authors of fifty portraits of King Lear and other Shakespearean themes, and generous recognition of Czech Shakespearean scholarship in the field of translation, particularly in the work of J.V. Sládek, Otakar Vočadlo, Erik A. Saudek and Zdeněk Urbánek, including detailed comment on some of their translation solutions and the tricky distinctions between English and Czech blankverse. The Shakespearean cycle is concluded by an article based on Stříbrný's book *Shakespeare and Eastern Europe* published by Oxford University Press in 2000, which allows the reader a fascinating glimpse of the author's profound knowledge of all Shakespearean connections in this part of the world from the earliest in the seventeenth century to the present. The article gives us a taste of the first tours of the "English Comedians" led by Robert Browne and John Green, as well as other troupes, around several German and Polish towns, and reaching as far as Olomouc, Prague and Vienna, in the first two decades of the seventeenth century.

The last two chapters bring us to the twentieth century, to H.G. Wells and G.B. Shaw. In "Love and Mr. Wells" Stříbrný defends Wells against his detractors and with his admirers praises his humour, realism and symbolism, acknowledging him as the 'voice of an epoch'. No less appreciative is the more extensive essay on G.B. Shaw, reprinted from Stříbrný's huge, two-volume *History of English Literature* [Dějiny anglické literatury, 1989], containing, as throughout Stříbrný's literary criticism, valuable references to reception in Czech English studies and on the Czech literary scene. Finally, the volume includes Professor Stříbrný's complete bibliography until the year 2003, which numbers over two hundred items.

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