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From foundation to closure : 1920–1939

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From foundation to closure: 1920–1939

A couple of years ago, in 2019, I set myself the goal of writing about the history of the English Department, and decided that one of my first steps would have to be to go to the Masaryk University archives on Žerotínovo náměstí and undertake some research. In the past, I'd picked up bits and pieces of information about the very beginnings of the department, but I had no idea how reliable they were. Pavel Drábek, for instance, once claimed that the Brno English Department as a Department of English standing on its own feet was the first in the country, older than the English Department in Prague. Later I was to learn that it's very difficult to say how old the department is, because the way universities operated back then meant there was no formal founding of departments as such, and so there's no document stating that on such and such a day the English Department was established.

When I turned to the people at the Masaryk University archives and asked how we might identify when the English Department was born, they said that probably the best way was to date it from the appointment of the first professor. And that was 9 August 1920, when František Chudoba was appointed professor by a decree of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.

One of Chudoba's first tasks would have been to set about creating what were called the department's *stanovy* – regulations guiding its operation. I thought to myself, well, maybe their approval was really the official beginning. But Jiří Pulec, the former Masaryk University Chief Archivist and the most knowledgeable person in the university about higher education practices back then, said no – these *stanovy* weren't that important. They couldn't be created unless there was already a professor who in effect embodied a department. So he confirmed that the only precise date we can use as the foundation of the English Department – or rather the Anglický seminář, as it was called back then – was indeed the day Chudoba was appointed professor.

František Chudoba, the Anglický seminář and King's College London

When I began my research, František Chudoba was little more than a name for me. Or to be more precise an image. When I first came to teach in the department in 1977 there was a whole series of portrait photographs of the Great Men of Czech English Studies hanging on the walls of Professor Firbas's office. And one of them was pointed out to me as being Professor Chudoba, the founder of the department and a literary scholar. But when I set out to do the research in the Masaryk University archives, I discovered, much to my surprise and delight – and gradual dismay – that the Chudoba files – or fonds, in library jargon – are one of the largest there. Masses and masses of stuff, thousands of documents dealing with Chudoba.

So, who was Chudoba? A very interesting guy. He was born in 1878 in a small town near Vyškov into a family of millers. This gave them a somewhat higher social standing in the community. Later, his father gave up being an active miller and became an agent buying grains for other

The founder of the English Department, František Chudoba. An official portrait from the 1930s.
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larger mills. Chudoba was a very bright youngster. He went to the grammar school in Přerov, where he got excellent marks, and would seem to have been on an upward professional track. But his dream in life was to become a painter. Unfortunately, his very practical father said: "No way." His plan was to send his son to university. And presumably, as he would be paying for whatever Chudoba did after leaving school, Chudoba was stymied. But he was stubborn. Chudoba's father wanted him to become a lawyer, an option Chudoba adamantly refused, saying that this simply didn't suit his temperament. So after long arguments and discussions they came to a compromise: Chudoba would study to be a doctor. He duly enrolled in medical studies at Charles University in Prague. Unfortunately, this backfired drastically because in their first semester students

spent hours and hours hunched over microscopes and a lot of their time in very cold rooms dissecting bodies. Chudoba became very ill, with some sort of chill so bad that he had to interrupt his studies. For the rest of his life he had health problems – internal organs, his spine – as a result of this unfortunate first semester.

Chudoba managed to convince his father that medicine was impossible for him and so he switched over to studying German and Czech. No English Department existed at the time: English was a sideline of Professor Václav Emanuel Mourek, whose main field was German. So Chudoba graduated in German and Czech. How he learned English so well is a bit of a mystery. Apparently he was enthusiastic about attending English lectures offered by Josef Václav Sládek, but it's questionable whether they actually helped him much in mastering the language. Evidence of this can be found in the archives, where there are some interesting drafts of letters that he wrote before graduation. He'd spent some time in Germany and had made friends there. He corresponded with them in English, and what's unexpected – at least to me – is that at that stage, his English wasn't very good. For instance, in the drafts he'd often cross out his first version and replace it with a new version – but it was still fairly rudimentary ("The last three months I ~~were~~ exercised me in English and therefore I write you in this language."). But he must have had tremendous discipline and willpower, because if you look at his later stuff in the 1920s and 1930s, where there are also first drafts, and where no native speaker could have corrected them, it's written in very good English. We of course don't know what his pronunciation was like. But it seems that that whole generation of Anglicists, and later generations as well, had a distinct accent when they spoke the language. This is completely understandable, given that they grew up before the age of radio and talking films, and had few opportunities to travel to Britain or meet native English speakers. There's no reason to believe that Chudoba was an exception.

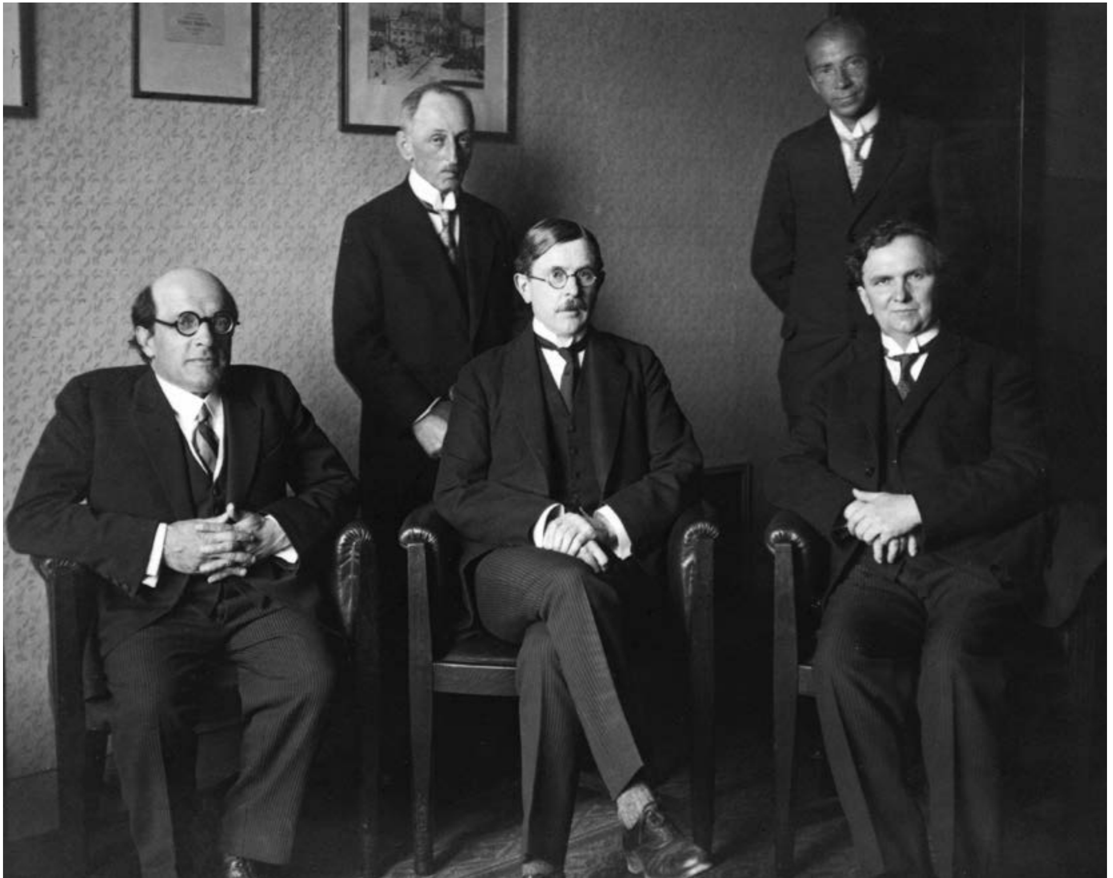
Chudoba finished his studies in 1905 with a doctorate in the fields of Czech and German. His dissertation dealt with the Unity of Brethren bishop Jan Blahoslav. In the succeeding years, he earned his living as a secondary-school teacher in various places, Brno included. At the same time, he began focusing on the English-speaking world and its literature, and published articles in various periodicals. These included reviews of new publications in both Britain and the United States and many articles dealing mostly with nineteenth-century English authors – the Pre-Raphaelites, Browning, Ruskin, Carlyle, Meredith. But what caught his attention in particular was the English Romantics. While the image of English Romanticism at the time in the Czech lands, and to a certain extent in the whole Central European milieu, was shaped by the dominant figure of Byron – who was basically a late classical writer – Chudoba became interested in other authors – Wordsworth and Shelley and Keats – who he considered the real representatives of Romanticism in English literature. In 1912 he became a docent – his *habilitační spis* was a book on William Wordsworth he'd published the previous year. It was a kind of bombshell here and elsewhere, a revelation that English Romanticism was about something very different from what people had thought it was. The work caught the eye of F. X. Šalda, and led to what was to be a lifetime friendship between the two. Later, Chudoba was to continue his love affair with English Romanticism here at Masaryk University – the presence of the Romantic writers in the English Department was very strong during the twenty years he was head between the wars. His hand-written lectures in the archives bear testimony to this. And his successor, Karel Štěpaník, continued this line of research with work focused on Keats and Hazlitt.

Chudoba's other great love was Shakespeare. His *magnum opus* in this field was the monumental two-volume *Kniha o Shakespearovi.* The first volume appeared in 1941, the year he died, and the second volume two years later. And it was truly monumental – the two volumes together add up to 1669 pages! Rather oddly, it was through Shakespeare, or rather the very large collection of books on Shakespeare in the English Department library, that I first came into real contact with Chudoba. When I joined the department in 1977, I soon discovered that we had a very

curious departmental library. The number of books was amazing, and the quality surprising, but it was only semi-functional. The books were scattered about on shelves in all the teachers' rooms as well as in cupboards in the corridor. To find a book you first had to go to the card catalogue – and know more or less what you were looking for – and find out from the card where the book was shelved. And for this they had a very strange system. The books had *signatury* – call numbers – that had originally been assigned to them based on the room and bookcase and specific shelf where they'd originally been placed when they were catalogued. But of course the books had been moved many times over the years, and this was also recorded. So you first had to see what the card catalogue said, and then you had to consult another card or a sheet of paper to see where the book was currently located. On top of that, all literature – poetry, novels, drama – was shelved by the birth year of the author. (They claimed this was the way they did it in Britain, but like many strange claims about Britain and the British, this was a myth.) But the library was run by *pomvědi*, student assistants, and it seemed that if they didn't happen to know an author's birthdate when a book was being returned, and they were rushed, they'd go like "Hmm – Dickens must have been born around … maybe 1810?" and stick it back on a shelf in an approximate fashion. At times it was impossible to find books, though you knew they were there somewhere because you'd run across them at some point earlier. It was total chaos, a total mess – utterly maddening. One of the most user-unfriendly libraries I ever experienced, second only to the Bodleian in Oxford.

After a year or so I started to find this so frustrating that I decided I had to do something. So I created a whole new system of call numbers. Not for the linguistics books, though. I said to Josef Hladký, "I don't know anything about linguistics so I haven't got a clue about how to categorize linguistics books – can you look after those?" and he did. But I was responsible for all the other books in the library. Somewhere around 20,000 volumes. I literally took down each book, erased or crossed out the old call number and put in a new one. (I should add that several students volunteered to help me in this – they too were very irritated by the system.) And in the course of what seemed like an endless task I kept coming across books about Shakespeare. At first I thought this was natural, Shakespeare being the literary giant he is. But the numbers kept mounting, and in the end I was totally stunned by how many there were. I mentioned this to Jan Firbas, and he was the one who informed me that Shakespeare was Chudoba's passion, that he'd been regarded as Czechoslovakia's leading Shakespearean scholar in the interwar period. What was amazing was not only the number of books, but the wide range of topics. In fact, I had to invent a whole set of sub-categories for them. One book that caught my fancy was on Shakespeare's boy actors. It was written by a Canadian who later became one of our most famous authors – Robertson Davies. It was basically the first scholarly work on the boy actors in Elizabethan theatre. And it's a relatively rare book. It came out in, I think, September of 1939 – at any rate, just as World War II was starting. Immediately they introduced paper rationing – it was a strategic resource – and many books that'd already been printed were recalled and pulped. So not many copies of that first edition have survived. And here was one of them in our library. It was also interesting to see how many books there were on the "Was Shakespeare Shakespeare?" topic. This was very big in the 1920s and 1930s and it's big again now. You know, it's like mythology – it's eternal, it's circular, it never grows old.

But to get back to Chudoba's early years at the English Department, as I said he was appointed professor in 1920 – in fact one of the first at the Faculty of Arts, which only began to operate that year, the same as the Faculty of Science. (The Faculties of Law and Medicine had started immediately in 1919, the same year Masaryk University itself was founded.) This makes him one of the Founding Fathers of the Faculty – there were of course no Founding Mothers. His task was straightforward – to set up the department physically and prepare it for the first students the following year. But almost simultaneously with being named professor here in Brno – only



R. W. Seton-Watson in Brno.
From left: Jaroslav Kallab (Rector, Masaryk University), Julius Glücklich, R. W. Seton-Watson (School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London), Jan Bečka (Rector, Veterinary University), František Chudoba (Dean of the Faculty of Arts), 1928.
© AMU, fond B 95 František Chudoba

three months later, in fact, in November 1920 – the Ministry of Education appointed Chudoba as Czech lecturer at King's College, the University of London. His job there mirrored his job in Brno – to establish Czech studies. The School of Slavonic and East European Studies had been set up during the war, with Masaryk himself giving the inaugural lecture in 1915. But it really only got going after the war. The Czechoslovak government was very keen to spread the word about all things Czechoslovak – or "Czecho-Slovak" as they tended to put it then – so they decided to fund a Czech lectureship. And Chudoba was chosen for the position, because he'd studied Czech and written a great deal on Czech literary topics – and more generally, on Czech culture – but he'd also made a name for himself in the field of English studies. He must have been adventurous – he set off for London in December 1920 without even receiving final confirmation of what his pay would be. So he arrived there in London and started what was the first Czech programme at any British university. A second Founding Father role.

For two years he led this double life. There in London he busied himself with setting up Czech studies and preparing lectures for students as well as public lectures. Three inaugural lectures came in February and March 1921, and they were big events. We have the flyer announcing them – they were chaired by the British Minister of Education, the Czechoslovak Ambassador in London, and the Principal of King's College. (Rather strangely, the Czechoslovak Ambassador, Vojtěch Mastný, is listed as Adelbert Mastný!) Chudoba also travelled a great deal around

England, giving lectures on Czech history and literature and Czech culture generally. And of course he was also using his time in England to buy books for the library of the new English Department here in Brno. Then he'd come back here and do everything that had to be done to get the department up and running, and at the same time buy books and other materials to send over to London for Czech studies.

So Chudoba had his hands full setting up the department. There's still some evidence of what this entailed. Among the things we still have dating from those days is the registry book for our library. It's a massive volume, beginning with the first books Chudoba bought, all entered in elegant handwriting. Another thing I discovered while rooting through the cupboards in the corridor of the old Building B, where we used to be when I started re-cataloguing the library's books, is the *Věcný inventář* of the department – the inventory list in which everything bought for the department was recorded. It's a beautiful object, with lovely mottled covers, and it offers a fascinating insight into just what "setting up the department" meant. From letters in the archives it's clear that professors were responsible for their own turf, for purchasing things to create their own little fiefs, and it's all there in the inventory book. Desks, shelves, curtains, lamps, stoves, coal scuttles, coat racks, a portrait of President Masaryk, spittoons (3 of them!), blotters, inkwells, rags for cleaning pens. And in each case, the cost (the rags cost 10 hellers). It's a very amusing document, a fascinating glimpse into how the "*c. k.*" world was still alive and kicking. Item number 1 in the inventory records the one single object on which the life of all institutions in this part of the world depends: *razítko anglického semináře*.

Samuel Kostomlatský and English-language teaching

Chudoba's commuting back and forth between Brno and London went on for two years, till the fall of 1922, when his time in London came to an end and he held his first lectures in Brno. But teaching in the department had actually begun a year earlier, in the fall of 1921. This was thanks to a practical English teacher by the name of Samuel Kostomlatský. As yet there weren't any students wanting to focus on English as such, but he offered courses in English open to all students at the university, and others open only to students at the Faculty of Arts. Kostomlatský came to English teaching in a roundabout way. His father was a Protestant minister here in Brno, and Kostomlatský decided he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps. Most of the Czech Protestants in this country back then were Calvinists, so Scotland, where the national church is Presbyterian, was a kind of magnet for many of them. Shortly before the First World War Kostomlatský set off to study theology there. When the war broke out, he remained in the country and even at one point served in the British Army. He was in the UK for more than four years, and by the time he came back to Czechoslovakia after the war ended, he no longer wanted to be a minister. Chudoba was looking for someone to teach practical English, and Kostomlatský was like a gift from heaven – someone with extensive practical knowledge of the language as well as lived experience of the realities of British life. So he was hired. He was associated with the department for more than thirty years, but also taught at the technical university and various language schools in the city. In fact, he was so active that it's been said that virtually everyone who learned or studied English in Brno between 1920 and 1960 had him as a teacher at some point. An exaggeration, perhaps, but not overly so. Antonín Přidal studied English and Spanish at the faculty in the 1950s, and enjoyed his teaching so much that after Kostomlatský was kicked out by the Communists in 1956, he took private lessons from him. In one of his books Přidal devotes a whole chapter to his reminiscences of Kostomlatský. He speaks of how different he was from other teachers, and how much his students liked him: "*Byl mile zvláštní a jeho dobrácké způsoby jsme milovali.*" But for Přidal Kostomlatský was more

than a teacher of English. He was someone he had a deep respect for, someone who was also a teacher of life.

I mentioned earlier how the books in the department library I was re-cataloguing were my first "contact" with Chudoba. In Kostomlatský's case, this contact was real, physical. Some time after I joined the department in 1977 I met him at an event we were celebrating, and then a couple of times later. I was charmed. He was this tiny, fragile old man; behind his glasses, his eyes sparkled with interest and curiosity. His English was careful, old-fashioned, slightly accented. In conversation you immediately sensed his modesty and sensitivity – later I learned that he'd written poems and speculative essays and several novels, composed songs, and took brilliant photos, particularly of the woods in the Chřiby Hills, which he loved. He was deeply unworldly, something reflected in the title of a translation he made of *David Copperfield*. Who else but Kostomlatský would choose to publish this world-famous novel under the title *Život s dobrým koncem*? When he died in 1984 at the age of 89, the department lost its last living link with its origins more than sixty years earlier.

Chudoba as academic and populariser

Chudoba was very active in the life of the faculty. The system back then was that Deans were appointed on the basis of seniority – that is, when they'd been named professors. So each professor knew in advance when he was going to be Dean. But he only held the position for one year, and then the next professor in line took over. It was more an honorary, symbolic job, not like today when the Dean has to be a major administrator, think about sources of funding, and so on. Chudoba's turn came in the 1927/1928 academic year – he was the Faculty's eighth Dean. He definitely belonged to its more conservative wing. There's some evidence that he was a quintessential Brno/Moravian patriot – he certainly distrusted Prague. It's hard to say what his reasons were, but for example he was a very strong defender of the idea that the Czech spoken in Moravia was correct Czech as opposed to the lousy Czech they spoke in Prague. There are some very amusing letters where he points out to Prague colleagues just why their Czech was absolutely unacceptable. He kept up his interest in Czech and Czech literature for his whole life, writing articles and reviews for Czech publications and contributing articles on the Czech literary scene to the *Slavonic and East European Review* in London. He wasn't a fan of the Prague School of Linguistics either – and again, it's hard to know exactly why. For example, when Roman Jakobson applied here to be named a docent – to go through the habilitation process – Chudoba did everything possible to block him. For some reason he had an intense dislike of René Wellek. My feeling is that Chudoba regarded the people involved with the Prague School as radicals who didn't respect the rules of "proper" Czech. His idea of Czech was very traditional, concerned with maintaining and defending established standards, as opposed to the approach of the Prague School, which was to examine the actual living language – to put it in a simplified way. Also, many members of the Prague School were foreigners – even Wellek, though Czech, had been born and brought up in Vienna. And for Chudoba, who was a strong Czech patriot, it was somehow unacceptable that so many "outsiders" were making pronouncements about Czech, how it functioned or should function, and so on.

But he wasn't opposed to the Prague School as such. There's an interesting story that shows this. Chudoba regularly taught courses on the English language and historical development. But he must have been aware that this wasn't enough, that linguistics had moved on. Towards the end of the 1930s he asked some Prague School people what young linguist they would suggest who might come and teach linguistics in Brno. And Josef Vachek was recommended. So Chudoba entered into negotiations to bring Vachek to Brno, but these came to an end when the univer-

sities were closed down in 1939. Vachek says in his memoir that he himself was surprised, because Chudoba had this reputation of being a hard-line, anti-Prague School conservative. And it's true that he was conservative. He was also combative, and got involved in many battles with colleagues in the faculty academic board about whether this person or that person should be awarded something or not and often found himself defending some fairly conservative positions against professors who belonged to the progressive "camp".

Chudoba appears to have been more active than many other professors in *osvěta* – what we'd now call outreach to the general public or, in very up-to-date lingo, the "fourth role of the university". In general this was common among professors at Masaryk University in the First Republic. People had been fighting for almost 40 years to establish a second Czech university, and Masaryk University was very much perceived as a Moravian achievement. So there was a feeling among many professors that they should devote themselves – depending on the particular department, of course – to Moravian things: history, art history, geology and so on. Another notion was that they should be in touch with the general public – in other words, should offer public lectures, write articles for newspapers and magazines, and so on. Chudoba certainly shared this view. When he was in England, he was extremely active, travelling around the country during the year and a half that he was there giving public lectures about Czech literature, art and culture. And he did the same thing here, in all kinds of dinky little towns. This was a university professor going to give a lecture in Bystřice pod Hostýnem, for example, and other similar-sized places – lots of them. He was also very active in the Anglo-American Club here in Brno. These clubs existed all over the country during the First Republic. They allowed people to meet once a week, to play social games in English, to listen to a talk in English, to practise their English by speaking with one another. The Brno club invited guests as far as this was possible, had its own lending library, organized English classes. This was part of a wider phenomenon – here in Brno there was the Alliance française, the Circolo Dante Alighieri, a Russian club, and the Anglo-American Club. They shared a clubroom in the Slavia Hotel, each using it one evening in the week. The Anglo-American Club was very active, and at one period it became the coordinating centre for all the twenty or so Anglo-American clubs in Czechoslovakia. Apparently they were always very pleased when Chudoba came and gave them a talk.

He was also a "public intellectual", a very frequent contributor to newspapers, magazines, journals of all kinds. He wrote about English literature and culture, about American topics, about Czech literature and the Czech language, about translations. He had strong views on many subjects and was a natural polemicist, ready to launch strongly worded attacks on things he didn't like and ready to defend his position. This often led to extended debates in newspapers and journals. One subject he often returned to was the need to expand English at grammar schools. Back then, the teaching of English was almost exclusively restricted to *obchodní akademie*. Chudoba felt this was wrong – that it failed to recognize that English was becoming increasingly important internationally in all fields, not just in business. This was reflected in the way he followed the development of American literature and regularly ordered the latest fiction and other works for the department library. But there was also another aspect to this. He perceived English from what we'd now call an ideological point of view. He shared this view with Otakar Vočadlo, who followed him as a Czech lecturer in London, later went on to found English studies at Comenius University and ended up at Charles University in Prague. They both regarded the study of English as vital to combat the German influence in the country. But Chudoba wasn't as radical as Vočadlo, who at one point apparently made a proposal to abolish the teaching of German is Czechoslovak schools – this a time when there was a 30 per cent German-speaking minority in the country!

Some things Chudoba published were more literary. Several short translations of English poetry appeared in *Lidové noviny*, for example. And he was particularly good at feuille-

tons. There's a wonderful feuilleton by him in which he criticizes the way the city of Brno was caring for its public greenery and contrasts this with the majesty of a splendid plane tree at the corner of Veveří and Pekárenská streets. This was in 1930 – more than seventy years before the tree in question was declared a *památný strom*.

Chudoba's role as a populariser also included radio broadcasts, something that would have been unusual at the time. Among Chudoba's papers in the MU archives there's a hand-written text on the "Was Shakespeare Shakespeare?" theme that he must have prepared originally for some public talk – perhaps for the Anglo-American Club. However, he also cannibalized it at a later date. Bits are crossed out in red ink, and "radio – 13 minutes" and a date have been added on the first page. I asked the late Tomáš Sedláček, a long-time employee of Czech Radio here in Brno, if he could explain this. He traced this down in the archives and discovered that the shortened talk had been broadcast on a Sunday evening as part of what was then the most prestigious weekly Czech Radio cultural programme. Chudoba would have been heard right across the whole country.

I suppose Chudoba would have seen this as part of his mission. A truly cultured person, he believed in the power of literature and he loved writing and he corresponded with all sorts of writers and artists. Of course the problem with all personal archives is that they very seldom have the letters the individuals in question wrote – most of the letters are ones they received. But some very interesting letters Chudoba wrote have been preserved in the MU archives. In some cases they're drafts with corrections, in others fair copies. These are all letters he considered important – he wanted to be sure that he'd always know exactly what he'd written. And he did that particularly if there was a difficult situation, when he wanted to be covered.

Chudoba was a prickly character. It seems he held the reputation at the faculty of being someone that could be offended easily. Going through his papers in the archives, I came to the conclusion that he simply refused to put up with any kind of nonsense from anybody. He wasn't aggressive, just very clear and outspoken. There are several letters that he wrote to English colleagues at London University for which we have the draft copies. In them, he explains that he feels that they aren't dealing straightforwardly with him, aren't being responsible. These were when they weren't answering his letters, for example, when they lost manuscripts and so on. These letters are very polite, but also very specific, very clear, very direct. Chudoba was a boy from the country who'd made it to the top of the greasy pole with little help – he wasn't going to be treated like he wasn't their equal and he was quite ready to call a spade a spade. I think this is more what his "prickliness" was about than that personally he was easily offended or anything. He just believed things should function and work properly, and if they didn't, this should be brought to the attention of whoever was responsible.

By the way, one of his letters indicates that his office was in Building A, on the north side, facing into the courtyard. I tried to find out if there's any old plan that would help me pin it down exactly, but I failed. It would be nice to know the actual room he had his office in, because we have a photo of it showing his desk, portraits of American and British writers adorning the walls, a magnificent tiled stove complete with coal scuttle and all sorts of other bits and pieces.

Chudoba was definitely a workaholic. He used to leave home for the faculty every weekday at 9 am, come home for lunch – the family lived on Veveří, just above Konečného náměstí – go for a short walk after lunch and end up at the faculty, and finally return home sometime after 8 pm. He also went in to the faculty on weekends – on Saturdays and on Sunday afternoons. He'd often bring his younger son, Zdeněk, with him, and stick him in a corner to read a book. In a memoir of his family the younger son wrote he says it didn't seem strange to him – his father was there working and he sat there reading, each doing his own thing. A lovely picture – quite another world from the one we know today. In one of his letters Chudoba writes about Building C, which was built to house the Rectorate of the new university. He talks about how wonderful it is to

František Chudoba's office in the 1930s.
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follow its construction, of how it's night-time and he's looking out of the window of his office and sees this white building rising up in the darkness ... Imagine – he goes completely Romantic over Building C! But for him it was more than just a building – it represented the new university and all its promise, the whole confident, optimistic march forward of Czech society post-1918. And Chudoba was certainly a deep Czech patriot.

Being a workaholic who was involved in many projects, Chudoba seems to have had little time or space for friendships. He had a few colleagues at the Faculty of Arts who were long-time friends. Sundays he often visited the Classics professor František Novotný. Sometimes on Thursday he met with Arne Novák. (I have no idea why these specific days, but that's what his son says.) Rather surprisingly, his closest friendship was with F. X. Šalda. In fact, Chudoba was Šalda's only long-time friend. Šalda himself was a similar kind of loner, and these two somehow hit it off, and stuck together until Šalda's death. Šalda had been very impressed by Chudoba's discovery of the English Romantics and by his whole emotional approach and commitment to literature, and Chudoba admired Šalda immensely. They corresponded regularly, and a selection of their letters was published after the war as *Listy o poesii a kritice: vzájemné dopisy F.X. Šaldy a F. Chudoby.*

Finally, I shouldn't forget one central aspect of Chudoba's life and temperament – his love of the visual. He'd been dead serious when as a schoolboy he said he wanted to be a painter. As late as the summer of 1903, when he was well into his university studies, he went on a course held by the painter Alois Kalvoda in the village of Radějov, just south of Strážnice; a charming period photo still survives. And his family still have some of his paintings. They're fairly accomplished landscapes in a late Impressionist style. Apparently his professional career left him no time for painting. But the world of art remained very important for him. Among the first acquisitions of

the English Department were about a dozen graphic portraits of British and American writers. These were in fact donated by Chudoba – he obviously felt it was important for the students to be exposed to high quality art to inspire them. When he was in England in 1920–1922, he often gave talks on contemporary Czech art and artists. His whole life he continued to collect works of art – mostly prints, but a few paintings as well. His correspondence includes many letters to artists that document in part the works he collected. And his letters to family and friends are full of very visually evocative descriptions of places he visited – forests, parks, and so on. His deeply Romantic spirit clearly chimed with the world of nature.

The students

There were probably very few students, but it's impossible to know just how many. It's impossible because people didn't register in any kind of degree programme back then. It was quite simple: if you passed your *maturita* at a grammar school, you could automatically attend any university you wanted. (This was on the basis of a law dating back to 1851!) You could sign up for whatever subjects you wanted, though there was a minimum number of hours per semester, and students had to pay for the number of hours they were taught. There must have been restrictions for fields like medicine, but this didn't apply to the Faculty of Arts. Once at the university, you could attend whatever lectures and classes you wanted. To complete a subject – English or German or History or whatever – there'd be some required number of courses in that subject you had to take. You were then given a document called an *absolutorium* confirming that you'd completed your studies – that is, that you'd met the requirements for that subject. For some that was it – they left the university and began their working lives. Only if they planned to teach did they need to take a state exam. We do have a list of students between the mid-thirties and 1950 whose *absolutorium* was in English; only nineteen of them pre-date the beginning of the war. But there aren't any records of this final exam, which seems a bit bizarre. However, even a list showing who'd taken the state exam at Masaryk University wouldn't be definitive. That's because you didn't necessarily have to take it at the university where you'd studied. You could finish in Prague if you wanted, or in Bratislava. So records are very patchy.

We do know if someone did a doctorate. This was rare. There were only two or three of them at the department in the interwar period. The first one was on Whitman. This is interesting for a couple of reasons. The first is that it reminds us that the departmental library has a fabulous collection of American literature based on what Chudoba purchased back in the 1920s and 1930s. A collection of twenty volumes of Washington Irving's work. Twelve volumes of Ralph Waldo Emerson's journals, six of his letters. Dozens of works by Mark Twain. A 37-volume set of Henry James's writings. And hundreds of titles by other American authors. Portraits of Emerson and Whitman hung on the department walls. Chudoba regularly reviewed books on American literature. Yet at the time American literature still wasn't taken very seriously as an academic subject. In the fall of 1947 F. O. Matthiessen, the man who created the concept of the American Renaissance, came to Czechoslovakia and taught a semester in Prague. He was completely astounded by how few American books they had in the Prague English Department library. Granted, some books may have disappeared during the Second World War, but why American books in particular? It makes more sense that they probably weren't so interested in American literature in Prague, were more into British literature. The second reason why I find the Whitman doctorate interesting is that the list of lectures published at the beginning of every semester shows that Chudoba never lectured on American literature. But though Chudoba was conservative, when it came to literature he was very open. Despite not teaching American literature at all, he supervised that doctorate on Whitman. This would make him the precursor of a strong tradition

in the department – if a student comes to you and says she or he wants to write on something or somebody, you say "Fine. Go for it!"

So we don't know exactly how many students there were. Limited numbers, definitely – the English Department was one of the smallest at the faculty. What were they taught? Kostomlatský had practical English courses with them. Native speakers – more about them later – also taught practical English courses as well as ones on British life and institutions. Chudoba had lectures and seminars. The lectures were devoted to the history of English literature and the historical development of English. Here, it seems students listened and took notes. They were more active in seminars, where they worked with literary texts, including ones in Old and Middle English. Several of Chudoba's lectures are in the archives. They're in Czech. Quite a few examples of written work produced by some of the students have also survived, both *domácí práce* as well as work handed in for the *absolutorium* and even the state exam. All of this work is in English. I found this surprising. Until very, very recently both Olomouc and Prague insisted on Czech being the language students wrote their final work in. In our department, it seems, right from the very beginning the practice was the opposite – students had to write in English. To me this is amazing, and deeply satisfying.

I wish we could know more about who the students were. In general, students then didn't tend to be very well off – many had to earn money in some way. Students from poor families could have their fees waived or partly waived, and there were also a few of what we now call NGOs that helped support them. Most students whose names appear somewhere in connection with the English Department were Czech. A few names appear to be German, some could be Jewish. Often students took courses in a number of disciplines, but only did their *absolutorium* or state exam in one or two of them, which adds another complication to the "who studied English?" question. Going through the names I had at my disposal, I discovered to my surprise that I'd actually known one of the pre-1939 graduates, Jan Nejezchleb. He was a friend of my wife's, since they both taught at the State Language School, and he was actually a colleague of mine, too, when I taught there in 1969/1970 after coming to Czechoslovakia. Other names emerged from anonymity thanks to Google. Juliana Obrdlíková, for example, was an important figure in the history of sociology at Masaryk University. There were also some "ordinary" people who for some reason have an on-line presence, and two or three "probables". And I realized that when I was in Prague in the 1970s I'd actually got to know one of the department's pre-war students quite well. This was Vladimír Vařecha. The war cut short his studies here in Brno. He managed to escape to the UK and fought with the RAF. After returning in 1945 he finished his studies at Charles University and became a well-known translator and teacher of translation. We met, of all places, at the Slovácký krůžek in Prague, where I admired his posh British English and his superb singing and violin skills (he was from Uherské Hradiště, which explains it). But most students remain anonymous. Who, for instance, was the intriguingly named Tuisko Keller? What happened to Julie Kubíčková-Spiessová, the author of the thesis on Whitman? A whole team would be needed to uncover the stories of those early graduates.

Lecturers from England

Chudoba had a strong belief that his department would be incomplete without a native speaker. And because of the contacts he made when he was in England, he had channels for getting in touch with very promising young people he might be able to lure to Brno. The most important contact in this respect was Sir William Craigie, a Scot who was the editor of the magisterial *Oxford English Dictionary.* Through him in particular Chudoba was able to bring a phenomenal succession of British lecturers to Brno in the interwar period. I don't know if they were phe-

nomenal as teachers at the department. Some of them undoubtedly were, but the selection was phenomenal in the sense that later they all became leading figures in the worlds of linguistics and English-language teaching.

However, things didn't begin so happily. When Chudoba started looking around for an English lecturer at the very beginning, in 1922, he found a man called Laurence Hyde. He was a British guy interested in Czech culture – if I remember correctly, he was enrolled at Charles University at the time. Chudoba arranged for him to join the English Department as an assistant teacher and to carry on his studies of Czech at the faculty. But this didn't work out. Before long Hyde started complaining that he had too much work and demanded a higher stipend. Chudoba hadn't the slightest patience with his complaints, and in a very polite letter he told him he was fired. (Hyde later translated Čapek's *Krakatit*, which turned out to be a total disaster. Even Čapek, whose English wasn't particularly good, was horrified when he saw how mangled the translation was.) After dismissing Hyde, Chudoba set about finding a replacement. A curious thing here is that although Chudoba was a great lover of England, of English literature and the English language, he had a very low opinion of the English themselves. In a number of letters to friends he expressed his feelings towards them – that they were irresponsible, rather feckless and untrustworthy, that they promised things that they didn't follow through with. In this light it's not so surprising that in one letter that he wrote to a friend about his search for a replacement for Hyde, he says "*Potřebujeme zde anglického lektora – mladého Skota s universitním vzděláním, filologa, třebas jen v anglickém smyslu. Nepíši Angličana, protože Skotové jsou zpravidla lepší pracovníci a lidé svědomitější. Ale znáte-li Angličana podobných vlastností, spokojíme se též Angličanem.*"

His search was successful – though he had to resign himself to an Englishman. Hyde was followed by Simeon Potter, who though young – only twenty-five – already had a lot of experience under his belt (including active service in the First World War) and was hyperactive. He jumped immediately into activities at the Anglo-American Club in Brno, and was soon its President. Later, he became the key figure in putting together the annual publication dealing with the activities of all the Anglo-American clubs throughout Czechoslovakia. His record as an author of textbooks of English was extraordinary. First there was a series of textbooks for the country's secondary schools – his co-author in these was the young Prague Anglicist Bohumil Trnka. Then came *Everyday English for Foreign Students*. This was based at least partly on his experience with his students in the Brno English Department. It's an odd book, in that it uses a rather eccentric system for indicating pronunciation, one invented by none other than – Sir William Craigie! Quite exceptional was *Rozhlasový kurs angličtiny pro začátečníky*. Potter wrote this to be used by people following a course he created and delivered live on Czechoslovak Radio in 1927. These were certainly the first "wireless lectures" – this was his phrase – in the country in which English was taught. Quite likely they were the first such course here for any language. Amidst all this activity he also managed to do a PhD at Charles University. In 1931 Potter left Brno for Southampton, where he began what turned out to be a very distinguished academic career in the fields of linguistics and language as such. He was also keen on popularizing scholarly knowledge. His name became widely known thanks to several publications directed at the general reader, in particular *Our Language* and *Modern Linguistics.*

Potter was followed by Stuart Mann, who it seems wasn't overly active in Brno or Czechoslovakia during his time here. But he was very active elsewhere. Every summer he used to disappear south. Apparently people didn't know very much about what he actually did when he disappeared south, but it turned out that his first love was Albanian. He'd first come to Albania in 1929 to learn Albanian and immerse himself in Albanian culture. He made a living there by teaching in a private boys' school in Tirana. Many years later he wrote a charming short account of his memories of Albania back then. From it you can tell he was clearly fond of the country, but at the same time he makes it sound a bit like a Ruritarian operetta – amusing and implausibly

bizarre. But his grammar of Albanian is still the standard book used by English-speaking students learning the language – almost ninety years after its first publication!

One thing Mann definitely did do when he was here in Brno was to get to know some of the local Roma. Through a Roma student in the department, he visited a group of Moravian Gypsies living in a camp somewhere on the edge of the city. He befriended them, and when he felt he knew their language well enough he wrote to the British and Foreign Bible Society in London. This organization was founded in the 19th century with the specific aim of translating the Bible into languages where a translation was still lacking. In this way, it could help spread God's word to all the peoples of the earth. Mann offered to translate the Book of Acts into what he called "Moravian Romany". His offer was quickly accepted – every new language meant more potential souls saved. Apparently when the book appeared in 1936, he was sent copies by the Society along with a letter asking if he mightn't be interested in becoming a missionary to the Roma, since he was the only one who could communicate with them! The bitter irony of all this, though, is that less than a decade later virtually all the speakers of "Moravian Romany" had vanished in the Holocaust.

Like Simeon Potter, Stuart Mann also published many books. One's called *Anglamer: A Simple Method for Learning to Speak English.* This sounds promising, but Anglamer turns out to be a weird new system he invented that he claimed made mistakes in pronunciation impossible. It employs a phonetic script with 37 letters, distinguished by various diacritical marks (including the Czech *háček*), and a system of punctuation marks and spaces to indicate rising tones, falling tones, a higher pitch and so on. I shudder to think that he probably tried the thing out on his Brno students! Mann eventually ended up in London at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies – the same place where Chudoba had launched Czech studies more than a quarter of a century earlier. He taught Albanian and Czech there. But as a linguist he was interested in a much broader area – the Indo-European languages as a whole. It's claimed that he was able to understand – or at least read – every one of them. Whether or not that's true I guess can't be proved. But the twenty boxes of Mann's papers in the SSEES archives contain documents that are stated to be in the following languages: "Albanian & Armenian & Basque & Breton & Czech & Dutch & English & Etruscan & French & Georgian & German & Greek & Hittite & Italian & Kalmyk & Lettish & Lithuanian & Persian & Portuguese & Romanian & Romany & Russian & Serbo-Croat & Slovak & Umbrian & Welsh". Impressive! He must have been one of those archetypal English academics devoted to rooting around in arcane and remote corners of knowledge. These materials must have been behind his life's work, *An Indo-European Comparative Dictionary*, published in 1987.

The last lecturer brought to Brno by Chudoba was W. Stannard Allen. He came in 1937, at very short notice at the beginning of the summer semester. Apparently the wheels of the bureaucracy had turned very slowly. Chudoba had told Allen his two sons would meet him at the train station. To help with identification, Allen sent him some small snapshots he'd hastily taken of himself that he thought would give them some idea of his general appearance. He added that he'd "doubtless look unmistakably English on Brno station", look younger than his age (he was then 24) and be carrying part of his luggage in a rucksack. Allen's time with the department was relatively brief. The next year came Munich, and in March 1939 the occupation of the country. But that summer Allen was still planning to return for the 1939/1940 academic year. As late as August 1939 he was writing to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts – in very impressive Czech – explaining that the German Embassy in London had told him it was out of the question he'd be able to enter the Protectorate without showing proof that he indeed had a contract with Masaryk University. So he asked if a copy of the contract could be sent to him in Vienna, where he was travelling to, and where he'd be able to get an entry permit for the Protectorate "from the Gestapo". It's all so weirdly neutral and innocent.

Allen too wrote textbooks of English. The best known are *Living English Structure* and *Living English Speech*. *Living English Structure* is probably the most successful textbook in the history of English teaching. It was first published in 1947, and almost seventy-five years later it's still in print. We were using it in the department in the 1970s and 1980s, and it was invaluable, especially since contact with the English-speaking world and English speakers was so limited. Allen's books were among the first to use ordinary English speech as the basis for teaching grammar and other patterns. It's one of my fantasies to imagine that he began trying out this approach when he was in Brno. In fact he returned to Czechoslovakia after the war, and was a lecturer at Charles University, so perhaps it was Prague students who were his guinea pigs. In 1993, when Josef Hladký was Dean at the Faculty of Arts, he proposed awarding Allen the faculty's Silver Medal. This was approved, but then the question was how to get it to him. By chance I was going to England at the time and I took it with me. I visited him at his home in Guildford, south of London, and presented him with the medal and accompanying diploma. We sat and chatted for an hour or two. He told a lot of good stories, in particular about Stuart Mann, who he knew very well. But If I'd been as curious about the history of the department back then as I am now, I'd certainly have pumped him for much more information.

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