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Interlude : the war and its aftermath

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Interlude: the War and its aftermath

In November 1939 the Germans didn't actually close the university down legally – they suspended its activities for three years. A skeleton administrative staff remained, and the professors were sent on “temporary holiday” and provided with some kind of payment – this was Chudoba's case. By this time he wasn't at all well. For the past fifteen years or so he'd spent part of each summer in some spa in Bohemia – Poděbrady was a favourite – or in Slovakia. And like many people he was psychologically and emotionally broken by Munich and then the occupation. So he spent most of his time then just working on his book on Shakespeare. He died early in 1941. The first volume of his *Kniha o Shakespearovi* appeared that year. His older son, Bohdan, finished editing and saw through the press the second volume, which was published two years later. He was also responsible for the publication in 1945 of the collection of letters exchanged between his father and F. X. Šalda that I mentioned earlier.

Bohdan Chudoba was a historian, very right-wing, very Catholic. This wasn't a good combination after 1945. Even before 1948, the *vědecká rada* was dominated by Communists and their sympathisers, and though apparently his habilitation work was very accomplished, it was simply unacceptable ideologically. So the habilitation process was suspended – a huge *cause célèbre* in the little world of the university. After 1948 he emigrated, and of course there were severe repercussions for the family here – his mother and his brother Zdeněk and family. The flat was confiscated, Zdeněk was held in detention for some time, they couldn't get jobs and so on. Bohdan was the kind of golden boy in the family – extremely bright, praised by Šalda and everybody's favourite – and then he leaves and his family's left here to pick up the pieces. Unfortunately not an uncommon Czech story. When I spoke with old Mrs. Chudoba – Zdeněk's widow – about this period, there was definitely a bit of tension in the air and much was left unsaid.

Chudoba's effects

But long before 1948, Chudoba's books had disappeared. When the university was closed down, Chudoba apparently took masses of books from the department home to use in connection with the book on Shakespeare he was writing. And he also had a huge personal library. After his death his sons returned most of the books that belonged to the department. At least that's my conclusion, judging by the relatively few books listed in the departmental library catalogue that are missing. But Chudoba's personal library was divided up among relatives, and the rest sold to the university library (now the Moravská zemská knihovna). But other things somehow made their way back to the department. Among them were some of those graphic portraits of authors that had been Chudoba's personal possessions. I found them when I was rooting round the cupboards in the department where scholarly journals were stored, along with others that belonged to the department. In fact, not knowing at the time what they were, I once took the portrait of Kipling, and used it in a Gypsywood production. How dumb I was!

The poem 'Merlin and The Gleam' (apparently) was written when the "Idylls of the King" were already.

In spirit this poem is very different from his other Arthurian poems.

It is full of symbolism. Merlin, the sorcerer, signifies the spirit of poetry.

The young mariner—the poet—that watches the "gleam of wonder" to follow "The Gleam" — the poetical imagination, the pure ideals.

Tennyson gives in this poem a sort of a philosophy.

After he had learned the secret of the great master he followed The Gleam for his whole life.

In Tennyson's youth The Gleam, "moving through the valleys and mountains and shone on the faces.

Some people — the critics