

Kakania. In Čapek's narrative of the long life of a cultured railway official, the transition from the old empire he served and the new republic he welcomed was seemingly successful. In the early 1930's as an aging man seeking to recount his life, he discovers an empty, invisible space within himself. Looking outside of himself from the moving train of time, he cannot find his way back home.

The political crisis in Czechoslovakia exploded in the parliamentary elections of 1935. With Hitler now Chancellor of Germany, the *Sudeten Deutsche Partei* won a plurality of the votes and the Czechoslovak Agrarians who ran a close second managed to eke out a single vote majority. Ort cites the participation of Czechoslovak fascists but names no names. In the arena of history, the consequences of the fatal *mesalliance* between Czechs and Germans were brutal. In the conclusion, Ort steadies his gaze on the Čapek brothers in the cynosure of national tragedy, pathos vaults over situational ironies. Karel died of pneumonia on December 25, 1938, knowing that his world had died. Josef survived him to be picked up by the Gestapo on the first day of the war. His remains have not been separated from the ossuary at Auschwitz.

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***The Czech Avant-Garde Literary Movement Between the World Wars.*** By Thomas G. Winner. Ondřej Sládek & Michael Heim, Eds. New York: Peter Lang, 2015. v, 200 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Illustrations. \$77.19, hard bound.

The late Thomas Winner's study is a welcome addition to a growing body of critical studies on modern Czech literature in English. One could see it as a sequel to Thomas Ort's 2013 *Art and Life in Modernist Prague*. While both books cover roughly the same historical period, Ort is concerned with the Karel Čapek generation rallying under the banner of Cubism, while Winner deals with the seminal writer only in his "Prologue" subtitled "The Antecedents." Indeed, Čapek's translations of Apollinaire, Vildrac, and others, collected in 1920 as *French Poetry of the New*, are justifiably seen as the chief inspirational source for the bold verse experiments of the poets coming after him. Besides Čapek, Winner also comments on "the pioneering role of S. K. Neumann" (20), whose political radicalism had a direct bearing on the rise of Czech proletarian poetry in the early 1920s.

"The most important representative" of this movement, Winner continues, was Jiří Wolker, a consumptive youth who died "at the age of twenty four" (44). Despite their author's untimely demise, his ballads continued to exercise a magic spell over many generations of poetry lovers because of Wolker's disarmingly naïve lyricism that was capable of tempering his poems' hard-shell ideological message. The revolutionary politics and aesthetics coalesced in the most important Czech avant-garde group with an evocative botanic name *Devětsil* (*Tussilago farfara* in Latin). Led by the theoretician, Karel Teige, it brought together young iconoclasts across arts. And it was Teige who by gradually modifying his initial aesthetic program, launched in 1924 the first made-in-Czechoslovakia -ism: Poetism—the synthetic art for all five senses.

The middle three chapters of the book focus on a trio of the most outstanding writers of *Devětsil*: the poets Vítězslav Nezval, Jaroslav Seifert, and the prosaist Vladislav Vančura. Meticulously, Winner goes through all major Nezval's Poetist texts paying special attention to the poems *The Acrobat* and *Edison*. The former, Winner argues, "may be read as a meta-poem commenting on the nature of poetry and Poetistic poetics" (87). The latter, extolling Edison's genius, is striking because of its musical quality achieved not only through the phonic instrumentation but also

through its composition, which intentionally imitates the sonata form. Winner concludes Chapter 3 by Nezval's inspiration by visual arts manifested most patently by his poem "The Breakfast in the Grass," an obvious reference to Manet's canvas of the same name.

The sister arts tradition also played an important role in poems of the 1984 Nobel Prize laureate Jaroslav Seifert, scrutinized in chapter four. Even some of his output from the "proletarian art" period, Winner observes, "suggests the images of Rousseau *le douanier* as well as early paintings by Chagall" (112). Despite a trip to France with Teige in the mid-1920s, when the two poets "passed by the Louvre with contempt" (115), Seifert's literary pictorialism had its French source—Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* utilization of the visual aspect of writing. Some of his other experiments with synesthesia, though, are closer in their technique to Baudelaire's "Correspondences," associating sounds with colors and perfumes.

Vladislav Vančura—the subject of chapter five—was the only member of Devětsil who was not a poet. Yet, despite this, his works are unavailable in western languages because "his poetic prose has proved resistant to translation" (131). Winner explains that this is due to the marked idiosyncrasy of Vančura's language. His narrators—the dominant voices in all of his works—employ, as Winner puts it, "a complex, sometimes baroque style characterized by archaizing lexicon and syntax and with participial and gerundial formulations unacceptable to the Czech oral style" (135).

Chapter six traces in a rather brief manner "The Relation of the Prague Linguistic Circle to Poetism" (157) and, through many documents, illustrates a close friendship between Roman Jakobson, Seifert and Nezval, and Jan Mukařovský and Vančura. On the theoretical level, it reports about the Prague Structuralists' spirited defense of their Poetist comrades against local linguistic purists. The bone of contention was the purists' demand that writers strictly adhere to the norms of literary Czech, which the transgressive avant-gardists flouted whenever it suited their purpose. The book closes with the transition from Poetism to the newest Parisian *dernier cri*—Surrealism initiated by Teige around 1934.

Winner's work is useful for anybody interested in modern Czech literature. Besides a number of close readings of several canonical works it presents extensive English translations of many difficult texts. I recommend it without qualification.

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**Reading Václav Havel.** By David S. Danaher. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. viii, 270pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. \$70.00, hard bound.

Following Havel's death in 2011, scholars can now evaluate his body of work as a whole and begin properly to assess the significance and nature of its legacy. David S. Danaher positions his contribution carefully; it is not another biography, but the first extended attempt "to read Havel in a way that does not fragment but rather integrates the diversity of his writings" (6). Danaher notes that "most English-language commentators on Havel—who are, for the most part, academics oriented towards the social sciences rather than the humanities—have given priority to Havel's essays over his plays" (91), while literary scholars have tended to focus on the plays. Danaher himself brings broadly literary-analytical skills to not only the plays and essays, but also to Havel's letters, speeches and other texts. He sees in these multiple genres an embodiment of the "mosaic" approach to knowledge and life to which Havel often refers, notably in a letter to his wife, Olga: "it is only from a mosaic of apparently