

## NEUE LITERATUR

*Veltruský, Jarmila F.: A Sacred Farce from Medieval Bohemia. Mastičkář.*

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 1985, 396 S., \$ 25. – (Michigan Studies in the Humanities 6).

The stated main aim, and the principal success, of this book is the first publication in an English translation of the two dramatic fragments which are together known under the name of *Mastičkář* ("The Spice Merchant"). Despite the fact that one of the most useful published studies treating this play appeared in English (Jakobson, 1958), the text itself remains virtually unknown to the English-speaking and German-speaking worlds, due to the impediment of the language: 14th century Czech. Most students of medieval drama have thus ignored an important work, which has itself consequently been robbed of the attention it merits. This is a great pity: since Czech literature of that period has nothing else with which it may be compared. *Mastičkář* needs the European view if it is to receive fair assessment and appreciation.

Veltruský's English version is slavishly precise, never once falling into the sin of using interpretative translation to attempt a resolution of obscurities in the text. This is particularly to be commended, as most readers would lack sufficient grasp of the original to recognise those obscurities. One need say no more than that as a faithful reproduction of the original it could hardly be bettered. Anyone wishing to stage the work in English would be justified in modifying parts of it. But a produceable version was not Veltruský's purpose.

The translation is preceded by a lengthy and smoothly-written study. Much of this is widened to embrace problems of medieval drama in general and is only loosely connected with the *Mastičkář* in particular. While this may be desirable in a doctoral dissertation, it might have been better pruned for publication. The introductory section is too superficial to serve as a general contribution to the study of medieval drama, but at the same time of small assistance to the adept seeking to come to grips with the Bohemian texts specifically.

It is in the chapters concerning characterisation and form (the latter in particular) that Veltruský makes her most valuable contribution. Here the reader is led descriptively and systematically through the complexities of the constant style-changes. Little will need to be said by future scholars regarding the formal structure of the two fragments: Veltruský has been quite thorough. However when confronting the wild fluctuations of style themselves, alternately pious and humorously vulgar, the author's bewilderment surfaces and she resorts once more to adducing English and French parallels simply to indicate that medieval drama was always like that. This is a truism; and it is applicable not only to the drama of the time. It might have been better to explore more deeply the indications of an intrinsic homogeneity, which she rightly

detects but then seems wary to tackle. The truly unique feature of the text – the merchant's mock resurrection of the Jewish boy Isaac by dubious ministrations, a passage not found in the materially related German Erlau play – might serve as a case in point. (This episode is preserved only in the "Museum" fragment; the so-called Schlängel-fragment gives hints of it, but breaks off prematurely.) Veltruský indicates how this incident brings out an analogy with Christ in the role of the merchant. She also mentions how the biblical Isaac was conceived as a prefiguration for Christ. But there, apart from adducing parallels to various of Christ's resurrection miracles, she leaves the matter. Yet if Isaac was viewed as a figure for Christ, it was because of the willingness of Abraham (the boy's father also bears this name in the play) to sacrifice his son, who is then saved by a last-minute divine indulgence. Precisely such divine grief and compassion is a stake here: the theme proper to Easter. Just as the Marys are moved by grief to purchase spices for their Lord's body only to find that the balm of compassion has restored him to life, conquering death, so the father's grief (paralleling God's grief at the mortality of fallen man) is the express cause of Isaac's resurrection. The merchant's words, formulated as part of an earnest prayer (305) „I co ty ležíš, Izáku, / čině otcu žalost taků?“ [“Well, why do you lie there, Isaac, / causing your father such grief?”] provide the clue here. On the other hand the merchant's cupidinous price for the deed is made to emphasise by contrast the gratuitous benevolence of God's dispensation to man.

However, such matters calling for deeper investigation apart, this book is a long overdue and meritorious contribution to the scholarship of medieval Bohemian literature. It provides the key to a door allowing passage both ways: students of medieval drama will now have access to a work worthy their attention, and *Mastičkář* may take its rightful place in the rich fields of medieval literary scholarship. One may even hope that its chances of occasionally living again on the stage are somewhat increased.

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*Petrin, Silvia: Der österreichische Hussitenkrieg 1420–1434.*

Wien 1982, 53 S., 1 Karte, 1 Abb., DM 9,80 (Militärhistorische Schriftenreihe 4).

Mit dieser Schrift hat Petrin, nach ihren Arbeiten zur Geschichte der Städte und Stände Niederösterreichs, einen weiteren wichtigen Bereich der Landeskunde fundiert aufbereitet. Für die Bohemistik wird hier anhand von größtenteils österreichischen Archivalien dargelegt, wie die Neuerungen der hussitischen Kriegsführung (Kriegswagen, Massenaufgebot) von Herzog Albrecht V. aufgegriffen und zur Bekämpfung der Ketzler eingesetzt wurden.

Dabei beginnt Petrin ihre Ausführungen mit einem knappen, aber die wichtigsten Fakten und Forschungsergebnisse erfassenden Überblick zum Verlauf der hussitischen Revolution bis 1421 (S. 1–5). In einem zweiten Abschnitt kommt die Autorin