

NEUE LITERATUR

Tobin, Yishai (ed.): The Prague School and its Legacy: in Linguistics, Literature, Semiotics, Folklore, and the Arts.

John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, Philadelphia 1988, xxix + 317 pp. (Linguistic and Literary Studies in Eastern Europe 27).

This volume of the important LLSEE series contains contributions to a Colloquium on the Prague School and its Legacy, held at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Be'er Sheva, Israel, in May 1984. It might well be viewed, as the Editor himself suggests (p. xiv), as part of the renewed interest in the Prague School evinced by the impressive chain of English-language publications to have appeared in the last twenty years. As has been remarked by various scholars at various times, including one passing reference in the present volume, many details of Prague School thinking could not have, in their day, the requisite impact on the outside world since so much was published in Czech, then, as now, not the most widely read language. The mounting tally of translations of key Prague-School works and of (re-)appraisals based on the amount to a belated growing recognition of one of Europe's main productive intellectual circles of the inter-war period.

It must be regarded as a success of the Israeli colloquium that the organisers secured offerings in practically all the manifold areas to which the Prague School, often through individual members, made its unique contribution, hence the division of the volume into five sections: 'Prague School phonology and its theoretical and methodological implications' (four papers), 'The Prague School and functional discourse analysis' (six papers), 'The Prague School and aspects of literary criticism' (five papers), 'The sociological and ethnological concerns of the Prague School' (three papers), and 'The Prague School's semiotic approach to the arts' (three papers). The papers' authors all come from North America, Israel or the Netherlands, though only two, Lubomír Doležal and Ladislav Matejka, are particularly well known for the specifically Czech dimension to their work. Their papers (on 'Literary transduction: the Prague School approach', pp. 165-176, and 'The sociological concerns of the Prague School', pp. 219-226,) are among those which adhere most nearly to Prague topics and sources. Others include those by J. C. Catford (pp. 3-19, on 'Functional load and diachronic phonology'), Anatoly Liberman (pp. 21-35, 'Distinctive features in synchronic and diachronic phonology', a paper dedicated to the Leningrad Seminar in Historical Phonology, the 'last blooming offshoot of phonology as conceived and developed in Prague'), Nomi Erteschik-Shir (pp. 145-153, 'Topic-chaining and dominance-chaining'), and Dennis Kurzon (pp. 155-162, 'The theme in text cohesion'). The last two entail discussion of post-Mathesius, i. e. post-war and post-Prague School *sensu stricto*, Czech developments in functional discourse analysis (Firbas, Daneš), though in such a Pragocentric volume neither notes the current role of Brno as an autonomous centre

(Firbas and others); in either paper one might have expected a reference to, for example, Aleš Svoboda's *DiatHEME* (Brno, 1981; in English), with its detailed practical demonstration of the author's own development of Firbas' theories.

The other papers range from historical surveys, such as the Editor's own paper showing the evolution of the phonetics-phonology dichotomy from Ferdinand de Saussure through to William Diver (pp. 49–70), to analyses and supplementary interpretations of individual key Prague-Schools works, such as Dinnah Pladott's essay on Jiří Veltruský's 'Contribution to the semiotics of acting' (pp. 289–303; J.V. was an early member of the School, who has remained active in its spirit though in exile), and items of original research perceived as owing some debt to Prague School thought and/or method. The connection is fairly tenuous in the case of, say, Zelda Kahan-Newman's 'The discoursal iz of Yiddish' (pp. 73–90; this contributor brings in Roman Jakobson almost as an afterthought towards the end of the paper), or Robert M. Vago's 'From segments to autosegments: nasalization in Sundanese' (pp. 37–48; the author acknowledges the Prague School origin of the particular controversy, but couches his analysis in more recent terms), or somewhat idiosyncratic in Hana Arie-Gaifman's 'Dominant = Tonic + Dominant' (pp. 177–183), essentially a musicologically metaphorical account of changing literary norms, again with a debt to Jakobson, or Maria M. Langleben's phonologically metaphorical approach to discovering the 'message' of Ambrose Bierce's 'thrillers' (pp. 205–215). There is, regrettably, not the space here to detail all 21 papers reproduced in the volume. Suffice it to say that, apart from containing numerous insights into everything from Spanish word-order (Florimon C. M. van Putte, pp. 91–108) to the semiotic functions of stage objects (Freddie Rokem, pp. 276–288) and due references *passim* to the (pre-Prague) Moscow connection, as well as being a cumulative appraisal of such key Prague figures as Trubetzkoy, Mathesius, Jakobson and Mukařovský, the book contains useful classified bibliographies, Notes and/or References to each paper, though no composite bibliography (there are, however, name and subject indexes). On the negative side, the book is seriously marred by countless misprints and misspellings, often chaotic and misleading punctuation, the occasional malapropism, inconsistencies in the spelling of names, in the transcription of Russian names, and in the use of different type-faces, some minor omissions from the name-index, isolated errors in the non-English examples, and some contradictions between references in a text and its accompanying bibliography.

The broad range of methods in scholarly pursuits as illustrated by this volume essentially shows two things: there is indeed a proven inspirational legacy from Prague, which has been widely developed in many disparate areas and directions; secondly, this being so, and accepting that 'legacy' collocates with 'deceased' (*pace* the Leningrad Seminar), one might question both the point or even the propriety of recreating the Prague Linguistic Circle, as has recently happened (see M. Červenka: 'Čtyřicetiletá odluka: Pražský lingvistický kroužek redivivus', *Lidové noviny*, 7. 3. 1990, p. 5; other journals carried similar items around this time). For circumstances have changed. Not every contemporary Prague linguist sees the sense of the reincarnation, though all may share the same free spirit of enquiry.