Alexander Baron: Power of Word in the Context of Karel Krejčí's History of Polish Literature

The work and legacy of Karel Krejčí (1904–1979) are very grandiose and multifaceted, and therefore cannot be covered in a single conference presentation or lecture. Our goals are: 1. to introduce the exceptional, complex personality of the internationally renowned literary scholar in Polish studies and too Bohemist Karel Krejčí, especially his overall contribution and merits to post-war Czechoslovak Polish studies – established both at Charles University in Prague and at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, which was established after World War II; 2. to focus on the linguistic analysis and interpretation of selected passages from his synthesis *Dějiny polské literatury* (History of Polish Literature), published in 1953. The value of this book stems not only from the fact that it is the first and so far the only Czech synthetic monograph devoted to the history of Polish literature. Professor Krejčí's unquestionable erudition also plays a fundamental role in assessing the overall quality of the work, as does the scholar's ability to write readable texts devoted not only to a relatively narrow circle of researchers with similar professional interests, i.e. primarily literary scholars specializing in Polish studies. More than seventy years after its first and so far only Czech edition, it could still serve as a quite useful university textbook – the word "handbook" is not appropriate given the scope of the History of Polish Literature (almost 600 pages including illustrations and extensive indexes of names and subjects). The words "quite useful" was not chosen and used randomly in the previous sentence, as we would also identify the negative side of the synthesis. The year 1953, when Krejčí's synthesis was published, as well as the previous years when it was written, belonged to the difficult early period of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. It was a period of political show trials and purges in the state administration and universities, aimed at suppressing as much as possible any potential resistance to the new government subordinate to Stalin and at the same time "preventively" intimidating citizens dissatisfied with the obvious violation of civil rights and freedoms. In the same year, 1953, the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences was established according to the Soviet model of centralised control. The aim was to restrict free, independent research and the development of science, including the humanities too. Karel Krejčí also had to adapt to the demands of that period, albeit without inner conviction, and was forced to modify his synthesis according to the norms of the day; otherwise, it would have had no chance for publication in Czechoslovakia at that time. However, these adjustments were "only" linguistic, and thanks to this, it is relatively easy to separate the ideological sediment (terms such as "class struggle", "period of imperialism" or "exploitative class") from the rich factual material and setting of the Polish literary tradition in a broad European context. Attentive readers of the History of Polish Literature may be pleasantly surprised by the fact that, in the era so hostile to free scientific research and the publication of its results, Krejčí managed to include such "decadent" or "bourgeois" names as Tadeusz Peiper, Zenon Przesmycki (Miriam), Julian Przyboś, Stanisław Przybyszewski or Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz in his synthesis.