



PROFESSOR BOHUMIL TRNKA SEPTUAGENARIAN

The present volume is an acknowledgement by colleagues, collaborators, friends and pupils of the work in the field of English studies and general linguistics of Bohumil Trnka (born June 3rd, 1895), since 1930 Professor of English and Older English Literature at Charles University, Prague. His work is a synthesis of the mathematically severe and the anti-positivist schools of linguistic thinking, characterized in its methodology by emphasis on logic and by opposition to psychology. What Trnka primarily aims at is the laws of the system structure and of its development with particular stress on the complementary character of the synchronistic and the diachronistic methods of approach. Although phonemic and morphological structures of English have had the greatest power of attraction for him, problems of style and correctness in usage have also played an important part in his life's work and study. This reveals Trnka as a scholar who intentionally seeks out antagonistic spheres where problems are in active opposition to each other: the sphere of material reality on the one hand, and the sphere of maximum potentiality on the other.

Apart from the most varied scholastic work, a wide field has been covered by Trnka's organizational activities. Let us only mention the most removed from each other in time: acting as Secretary of the Prague Linguistic Circle and as Chairman of the Circle of Modern Philologists attached to the Academy of Sciences. As one of the leading scholars of the functional school, he has always valued the empirical approach more than the speculative one, claiming that time cannot be wiped out in language nor dynamism in its static system. The value of the single components of language is only determined by their frequency and the extent of their application at the level of style. And hence Trnka quite naturally concerned himself extensively with the theory of linguistic statistics on the one hand and came to oppose the purely relational functional linguistics on the other. In the field of English literature, Trnka's particular interest has always been Anglo-Saxon poetry. But his lectures in the past have also abundantly covered English medieval, humanistic and renaissance literature. His teaching in this field went hand in hand with the publication of a series of literary historical texts, culminating in a study on Shakespeare as a philosopher, "the philosopher of common sense", in 1955.