

RIP RBP: Robert B. Pynsent Is Dead

Derek Paton



Today, I cannot really imagine never having had the opportunity to get to know Robert Pynsent (1943–2022). But actually, thirty-five years ago I almost didn't go to the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES). While at the University of Toronto from 1984 to 1988, I had befriended Gordon Skilling, professor emeritus, whose area of specialization was Czechoslovak politics and dissidents. When I told Gordon and his wife Sally that I had been accepted into master's programmes at Michigan, Glasgow and London, I asked Gordon's opinion of each to help me decide. He had obtained his PhD from SSEES in 1940. 'Well, a big part of your university years is the place where you'll be studying. And nothing compares to London. But that terrible man is there — Pynsent.' That was Skilling's reaction partly to the infamous Pynsent-Brušák-Short letter to *The Times*, in which, in less than 140 words, they bemoaned the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Jaroslav Seifert in 1984, and partly to Pynsent's not inviting Czechoslovak dissident historians to a 1986 Masaryk conference in London but inviting some regime-approved ones. 'Oh, don't listen to Gordon,' said Sally. 'Pynsent's all right. Don't worry. He and Gordon just crossed swords on occasion. That's all.' And that was enough, I suppose, to help me decide.

In the autumn of 1988, when I first went to SSEES, few people of my acquaintance were interested in Czech history, politics, or literature, let alone Slovak. That was, I think, true despite the international publicity the country could enjoy with Seifert's receiving the Nobel Prize only four years earlier, Forman's great success with *Amadeus* the same year, and Kundera still being all the rage, particularly with the film adaptation of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* released in 1988. But telling someone, say, at a party, that I was off to study Czech things in London was the perfect way to send that person looking for a way out of the conversation. It was hardly a surprise, then, to find when I got to SSEES that I was the only student enrolled in Robert's 'Czech Prose Fiction from 1958 to 1988', which I think he had to make because I was coming. And my Czech was so poor that he finally agreed to let me take the course largely thanks to David Short telling him that I would soon manage, particularly after a bit of help, which David generously provided.

Robert had joined SSEES in 1972. He and David Short, a superb scholar in his own right who came the next year, soon became the embodiment of Czech and Slovak Studies at that institution. Of course others, for instance, George Schöpflin included



aspects of Czech and Slovak history in their lectures on East European politics and nationalism for SSEES and LSE students, as did László Péter, Martyn Rady, and particularly Trevor Thomas when teaching Habsburg history. But Robert and David were the only teachers at SSEES focused on Czech and Slovak literature and language.

Their little offices were next to each other on the top floor of the five storey building at 21 Russell Square. The whole building at the time I arrived was pleasantly shabby, just rundown enough to suggest that it had been around a good long time and that money was not being spent, let alone wasted, on superficial renovations or modernizations. That is most probably an optimistic interpretation. And that is partly what made the place feel like someone's home. To get to David's and Robert's offices one had to walk up several flights of stairs, which got narrower and narrower and creakier and creakier with each storey. It was quite a hike even for a non-smoker like me. Robert and David were both smokers. Smoking was permitted in those days, during classes and seminars. That didn't bother me; it actually added to the atmosphere, as did the seemingly endless cups of PG Tips tea with milk, which Robert offered during the lessons, or the wine or vodka at the Thursday seminars, which the person giving the paper was required to bring. In 2005 (years after I had left), when University College London had bought SSEES from the University of London, Robert and his other SSEES colleagues who had survived cut-backs moved to a new building nearby, where, Robert complained, smoking was not permitted, one could not even open the windows and was left to the tender mercies of whoever or whatever was in charge of the overall air-conditioning of the new building. Nor was drinking wine permitted there, apparently to save the light coloured wall-to-wall carpeting. So much for atmosphere.

Though Pynsent told me that one-on-one teaching was the norm at Oxford and Cambridge in his day, for me being the only student on that particular course was a tremendous luxury. It was the first time in my years at university that I was being taught directly by the professor. During each lesson Robert and I sat at two small oak tables pushed together and strewn, on tidier days, with his ubiquitous ashtray, cigarettes, disposable lighter, red biro, mugs of tea, and, in the centre, a small Oxford Dictionary and Rudolf Havel and Jiří Opelík's *Slovník českých spisovatelů* (1964). The lesson consisted as much in discussing the assigned novel in whole or in part or the previous week's essay as it did going off on tangents. And the discussion was always genuinely two-way.

Robert's office had open bookshelves all around. They were filled with his own copies of Czech, Slovak, German and English books, rare and not so rare, which he had either bought when in Czechoslovakia or had received from friends who lived there. Indeed, the books were all the rarer in those days not only because it was more difficult to travel in and out of Czechoslovakia than it was after the collapse of the Communist régime, but also because taking books out of the country required the approval of the authorities, confirmation that the State Library of the Czech Socialist Republic (today's National Library) or its equivalent in Slovakia already had those books in its collection. And he readily lent them to people, some of them inscribed simply with his name and 'd.d.' followed by the name of the person who had given it to him and the year. Bookplates, like visiting cards, were scorned by Robert. But the books in his office were just a part of the Pynsent Library. A few others were in his



tiny basement flat in Witley Court, Coram Street, just a couple of minutes' walk from Russell Square, but most were down at Brook House, his home in Kent, with his wife Rosita and their daughter Harriet. And the heaps of books would grow considerably, eventually unmanageably, over the next three decades. In an effort to solve the problem, a stable next to their house was converted into a study for Robert.

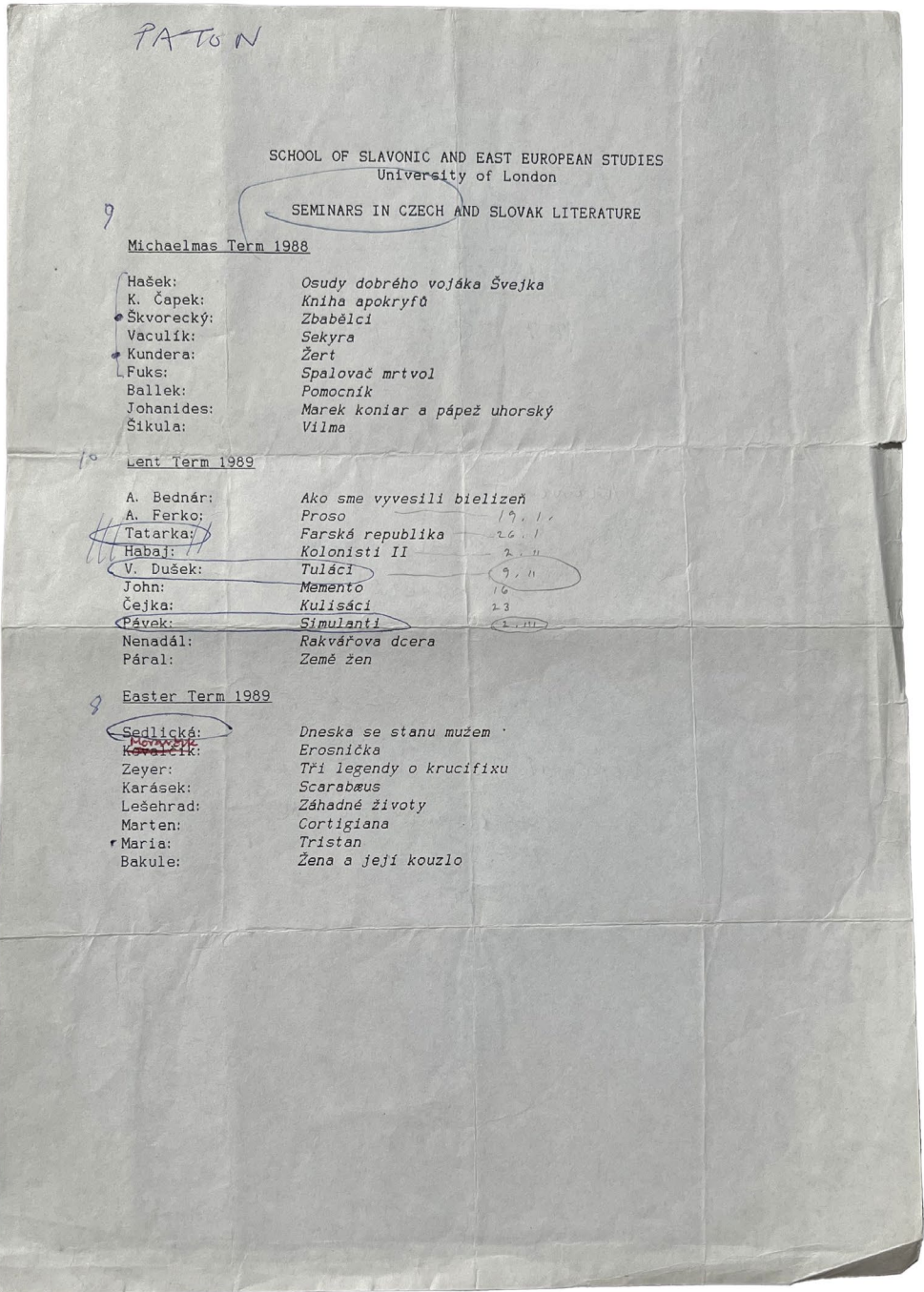
In addition to the strong smell of tobacco they emitted, the books were full of Robert's little pencil scribbles. His underlining and his squiggles and annotations in the margins of course made me and his other borrowers stop and wonder what it was he had found so especially interesting about a particular passage, sentence or word. I often had to ask him to explain his abbreviations. M, for instance, stood for moon (a frequently recurring symbol, apparently), E/E was Erzähler über dem Erzähler, Dec was Decadence or Decadent (in the 1980s still a topic of great interest to him), J was for Jew or Jewish, Ich and Er for narrators, and the occasional 'Ugh!' obviously indicated something Robert couldn't bear, often mawkish (his preferred word for insufferably sentimental), hackneyed, or a nationalistic generalization.

The beauty of studying (reading, Robert would correct me) literature, unlike politics, history or economics, was that it could be self-contained. One could mine a single work for a good deal of precious ore, examining it from many angles. Among the novels Robert had me read for the course or give a seminar paper on were Škvorecký's *Zbabělci* (1957), Fried's *Časová tíseň* (1962), Klíma's *Hodina ticha* (1963), Fuks's *Pan Theodor Mundstock* (1963) and *Spalovač mrtvol* (1967), Hrabal's *Taneční hodiny* (1964), Kundera's *Žert*, Vaculík's *Sekyra* (1966), Fried's *Abel* (1966), Páral's *Soukromá vichřice* (1967, to get a view of materialist behaviour under the Communist regime), Putík's *Smrtná neděle* (1967, for a journalist's feelings of guilt from remaining silent about truths unacceptable to the régime; apparently it contains the first mention of the expulsion of the Czechoslovak Germans in Czech belles-lettres), Hrabal's *Obsluhoval jsem anglického krále* (1971), Kantůrková's *Pozůstalost pana Ábela* (1977), Pávek's *Simulanti* (1983/86, for early signs of open criticism of the moribund régime), and Dušek's *Tuláci* (1989).

The course entailed reading one novel a week, in the original Czech, and writing roughly three sides (pages) on one of several questions that Robert assigned for each novel. At first, getting through a whole novel with my poor Czech required many long nights of effort. Writing only three pages a week, by contrast, was a great relief compared to what I knew from Toronto, where students were required to write about fifteen pages for about three courses but only at the end of autumn term and spring term. As at Cambridge and some other British universities, however, the academic year for Robert comprised Michaelmas Term, Lent Term and Easter Term. What was a bloody colonial supposed to make of that?

The short, but regular weekly essay (the standard British approach, Robert assured me) certainly helped students to write better prose. I sincerely wish I had been given that training much earlier. It was mostly a pleasure to get the weekly essay back from Robert with several comments, some large question marks or exclamation marks next to my 'idiosyncratic spelling', careless clichés, or jargon, but also even the occasional 'Good!' or 'OK!' scribbled in the margins of each page.

Though he wanted his students to read literature in the original language and to concentrate on the particular work he had assigned, Robert did recommend, often



The original list of 27 works to be discussed at the Thursday afternoon seminar at Russell Square during the 1988–89 academic year. This is the copy Pynsent gave to me, on which I scribbled in ballpoint, indicating the works I was supposed to present. The pencilled-in dates for January to March are also mine. Pynsent has crossed out the name of the author of *Erosnička*, correcting it to *Moravčik*.

quite strongly, that one read other works by the same author or a work that would complement the book he had assigned. It sometimes required a bit of research in the field of psychology or history or literature, but rarely, if ever, entailed theory. ('That? An experimental novel!? Really? Read Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* if you want a truly experimental novel!') He preferred to hear what his students themselves, independently of the experts, thought of aspects of the assigned work. He liked to point out that even Terry Eagleton warned against theory in the early 1980s (and, later, by 2003 had even published *After Theory*), partly for its jargon, and partly because it led people down roads far from the work one was initially looking at. For him, at least back in 1988 (pre-Internet days), a handful of books were the only other reference works essential for literature: *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* and a concordance to the Bible. He dismissed J.A. Cuddon's *Penguin Guide to Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1977), the one I owned of course, and recommended, instead, Joseph Shipley's *Dictionary of World Literary Terms* (1970). He praised the *Chambers Dictionary* ('but not the *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary!*') as far superior to the Oxford, that is, 'far more sensible', let alone any other. When I told him I'd never heard of the *Chambers* he took me straight to Dillon's in the wonderful Edwardian edifice diagonally opposite Senate House (which is said to be the building Orwell had in mind for the Ministry of Truth in 1984) and bought me a copy. Among the many books he later sent me over the years was a modern edition of *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*. The closest to a work of theory that he once recommended and gladly lent was Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony* (1956), saying that since I had some French the Italian passages would not cause me any difficulty. (Not true.) And that was also typically Robert: he had German, French, Latin, a bit of Greek, a bit of Russian, a bit of Hungarian, and was working on Bulgarian, and seemed to assume that everyone else had at least the same level as he did in most of those languages. He once mentioned in passing that he had been asked to read a manuscript in Polish and it was slow going but he had read the whole thing and assessed it. He often worked for no pay at all, simply because he had been asked to read and comment on a dissertation, a manuscript, or a publication.

For Robert, thinking hard, deciphering, linking ideas, and expressing them logically and clearly was the aim. Among examples of clear concise prose which he recommended were Orwell's essays. Years later he sent me a copy of Billig's *Learn to Write Badly* (2013). Even Billig didn't get off Robert's hook: 'a bit repetitive'. Robert also considered A. J. Ayer a fine example of a clear, concise writer.

The reading list for the weekly seminar on late Thursday afternoons was thumb-tacked to a wooden beam or the door frame of Robert's office, and included the dates when they would be discussed. Naturally, David Short regularly attended and so did Karel Brušák, who was always impeccably dressed in a suit and tie, mostly listening carefully, and occasionally grumbling or muttering something dismissive. Among the people I recall attending the seminar in 1988–89 were Karolinka Vočadlo, Kevin Power, and Stephen Daly, who were Robert's undergraduate students and already had a far wider and deeper knowledge of Czech than I did, Jiří Kudrnáč, the lector for that year, and 'guests' Barbara Day and, less often, James de Candole, and also, a couple of times, Alfred Thomas.

For my extended essay ('No, no, no, we don't call it a dissertation or a thesis!'), which was required to complete the MA, Robert suggested (that is, assigned) the topic





of guilt in the prose fiction of Jiří Navrátil (1939–2019). That meant reading the short stories and novels of an author whom probably no one had written about in English before or has done since. No, Navrátil wasn't ingenious, but the total of what he had written was a manageable amount for an MA student, and it contained some interesting things to discover. (Robert's friend Vladimír Macura, for one, also thought so.) Ultimately, it was an exercise. It became a bit harder for me to complete the dissertation from Prague once the Changes (Robert's preferred term for the Velvet Revolution) started in mid-November 1989, but did hand it in after some delay.

I have often thought that a key trait of Robert's was that he was radical in the true sense of the word. He went straight to the root of the problem or of the word, as deep as he could go. Perhaps related to his appreciation of good reference books, he had assisted Ivan Poldauf in the 1986 edition of the *Česko-anglický slovník*. Printed on poor-quality paper and flimsily bound, it doesn't hold up well to continuous use. Many second-hand copies are for sale today. I see one online now for 23 Kč. The Internet seems to have made these, like so many other reference works, largely obsolete. Most of the Seznam online dictionary appears to have initially been pinched directly from the Poldauf-Pynsent, with some updating over the years, some omissions of colourful translations, and the addition of a good number of typos, though maybe they are getting corrected. Admittedly, online dictionaries are quick and convenient, but when I recently returned to my hard copy of the Poldauf-Pynsent, I instantly realized how much better it is to look up a word and be able to see all the other related words before and after it. And the Seznam dictionary doesn't provide the user with the little usage notes that the Poldauf-Pynsent does. Most of them are provided in the three pages of its 'Seznam použitých zkratk a značek'; though that does not include, for instance, 'n. tř.', making the class distinction between the two English words for *ubrousek*: (table-)napkin n. tř. serviette — a finer point Robert might remind one in the course of a conversation or dinner.

Robert claimed to dislike the Internet. Indeed, he disparaged computers generally, and until the end of his life continued to write everything by hand, passing it on to someone willing to type it up for him, either on a typewriter or, later, a word processor, quite often David Short or David's wife — and that required considerable skill in deciphering Robert's handwriting. He also loathed mobile telephones, but did eventually use them. He insisted that land lines were the most secure: if there were ever a national or international disaster the land lines would still be operating. And he remained true to his tiny pocket diary, which I can still see him fishing out of the inner breast pocket of his jacket immediately to jot in a date or phone number or to check when and where his next appointment was.

That is by no means to say that Robert didn't indirectly make use of the Internet. He spent many hours on the phone with me, and undoubtedly others as well, checking obscure facts or searching for books, usually to buy. This soon became a weekly event. I would be at the computer and the phone in Prague while Robert was on the phone at Brook House, telling me what to look for. One thing blossomed into a dozen and we travelled down some pretty enjoyably convoluted paths on our searches. With Robert making continuously new connections we found loads of interesting things.

Ultimately, however, it was mostly Robert without a computer, with just a pen and paper, his books and his thoughts. Martin Janeček, Robert's editor at the Karolinum



Press, once suggested to me that Robert's special approach and views of literature were perhaps partly the result of his not succumbing to the endless digressions and distractions the Web has to offer. That is undoubtedly a reasonable conjecture. Unfortunately, not being 'linked in' was not enough to save Robert from many digressions and distractions partly of his own making. He ended up buying so many books and accepting so many requests to read (that is, to edit) other people's work, including requests from me for translation advice, and accepted so many offers to write things of his own that, in combination with his hunting for the most obscure works of his chosen authors, he did get bogged down and waylaid and so much has been left unfinished. Some of his excellent plans, including a history of histories of Czech literature for the Karolinum Press, may never see the light of day. One can only agree with Martin Janeček when he said that he would have so much liked Robert to do a book about medieval Czech literature because he knew Robert was extremely knowledgeable on the subject and would have taken unusual angles. Another planned work of Robert's was based on his hypothesis that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* may actually have originated in Bohemia, and he bought loads of books which he believed would provide evidence to support that view. In recent years he also became a great admirer of the philosopher J. L. Fischer (1894–1973) and eventually bought all his works with the aim of writing something on him.

Robert's vast library of Czech literature or, better said, literature related to Bohemia, comprised books not only in Czech but also in German, French, and other languages, as well as secondary literature related to his diverse research interests. Thanks largely to the efforts of Rajendra Chitnis, Robert's pupil (a word Pynsent would have insisted on), and today Associate Professor in Czech at Oxford, it is now part of the Taylor Institution at Oxford, where, once catalogued, it can be put to excellent use.

Robert was a great letter-writer and it would be interesting to see the letters or even just a list of everyone he had corresponded with, including — of the people I heard him mention — his Cambridge professor J. P. Stern and the authors Vladimír Páral and Petra Hůlová. I have no idea what of that, if anything, will end up in a library.

It was perhaps Robert's great enthusiasm I like to recall most. He was fired up by books of course, but also by encounters with ordinary people, by animals, the countryside and the preserved villages of Kent, and the idea of continuously learning. ('I am embarrassed to say I had no idea about that! Did you?' Of course, I didn't. 'Well, at least we learned something! It is interesting, isn't it?') I have never seen anyone so thrilled about a newly discovered book or author, and that included not just the contents but also, at least in many nineteenth and early twentieth century books, the adverts for other publications, which led to more book hunting.

Robert loved to converse, not just with friends, but also with strangers — in pubs, in his flat, in cabs, in the garden centre, on the phone. The weather of course was a natural ice-breaker, a regular topic, but so were his dislike of Thatcher and the Communist regimes, his respect for Havel as a thinker, his dislike for Václav Klaus (all volumes of whose collected speeches Robert gradually bought with the aim of writing an essay on them), dumber-down, political correctness, slebs, his dislike of Theresa May and, most recently, Boris Johnson, whom he nick-named 'Prime Pork'



(with a nod to Cockney rhyming slang for 'lies' — porkies, pork pies). Robert could chat about a seemingly endless number of things that had little directly to do with Czechs or Slovaks, and go into quite some detail. For instance, he once launched into an explanation of how driving on the right (that is, the correct) side of the road, the left, derived from soldiers' needing to keep their sword hand free, or in which countries one drove on the left and where they used to drive on the left but no longer do (like Bohemia, till the day after the German invasion in March 1939). He could defend the British Empire, public schools, and the class system, and praise British soldiers for having valorously saved thoroughbreds in occupied Bohemia. It seems that everything was potentially of interest to him.

Robert had read, and remembered, a good deal of history, including medieval, and could be relied upon to come up quickly with the right word or phrase for a translation. I may sometimes have initially doubted his choice but later on, after poking around the Web, I saw that he was almost always right. That may also be because, unlike in North America, where I grew up, so much earlier history is all around one in Great Britain. Robert had much of the fundamental literature, the canons, in English, French, and German in his head. The Bible, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Chivalric romances, and philosophy, myths, legends, symbols, and emblems, all seemed firmly tucked away in Robert's staggeringly good memory. In mid-1989, as I was leaving London, he was reading all of Freud, still highly sceptical of him, for something he was working on.

Among the places he and his students and colleagues would drink were the Tavistock Hotel, the Imperial Hotel, and the unglamorous basement pub of the Institute of Continuing Education. I am surely not the only one amazed that Robert could consume so much alcohol and still function. After the pubs closed, and he decided to go home and work, he actually did until the wee hours. 'Alcohol is like fuel,' he explained. 'It helps me to stay alert and concentrate.' Not me.

Robert was not just loquacious. He was an excellent listener, a sympathetic one. I know of at least a couple of students in my day whom he truly helped. He was available for them round the clock. His tiny basement flat at Witley Court was almost always open for them. People just dropped by for a beer, a glass of wine, a cup of tea, but mostly just to chat after the pubs had closed. And at the other end of the clock, I remember going with someone, though I don't recall who it was, to deliver a late essay to Robert one morning, pushing open the door (which he'd left ajar), and dropping the work at the foot of his bed, which he was still in, half asleep in the twilight, his feet poking out from under the duvet.

Robert's willingness to help others led, for example to his creating a course for a young woman from an observant Jewish family in London. When her parents objected to her studying Czech literature, he put together a course with works in Czech about Bohemian Jews or by Bohemian Jewish authors. He considerably developed his own knowledge of this area continuously discovering, buying, and reading new works related to the subject. The topic naturally includes antisemitism and Robert reached some untypical conclusions, defending authors like Alfons Sedláček (1897–1981) and Václav Fiala (1896–1963) against charges of antisemitism or Nazi collaboration, and finding antisemitism in authors who were generally considered to be free of it, like the Čapeks. Such conclusions were too often met with scepticism by others. I think he

argued his points well and in any event he opened up new discussions. His claims were for the most part hardly as wild as many of his critics have tended to think, particularly those who could feel that Robert denigrated and disliked the Czechs.

Robert's works on Czech women writers have brought some long lost souls back into the light and his conclusions here, once again, were often not what one might expect. In the essay 'The Liberation of Woman and Nation: Czech Nationalism and Women Writers of the Fin de Siècle' (1996), he points out that some of these writers, as activists for Czech autonomy or independence and women's rights, became staunchly nationalist and sometimes antisemitic. Thanks in part to Robert, Kathleen Hayes translated and edited the volume *A World Apart and Other Stories: Czech Women Writers at the Fin de Siècle* (2022).

In the early 1990s, I went back to SSEES with the intention of doing a PhD. From the time I had left London in August 1989 I had repeatedly told Robert I would like to return. He had been proposing the works of Josef Karel Šlejhar (1864–1914) as a possible dissertation topic for me. At that point, as far as I know, no one had written anything substantial about him. Consequently, I duly read all his works (except *Floriant Bílek, mlynář z Myšic*, which I couldn't find a copy of till much later — now in the Taylor Institution, Oxford), read other works by his contemporaries, made a comprehensive bibliography of works by and about Šlejhar, and wrote a couple of essays. Ultimately, however, I concluded that it made little sense for me to be starting a PhD at the age of 35. I abandoned the idea and went back to Prague. In choosing Šlejhar for me, however, Robert, who had read several of his works, once again demonstrated that he was a few steps ahead of the crowd. In 1999, a film adaptation of a Šlejhar short story was released. The following year a boxed set of his works was published and during that decade two other publishers issued works by Šlejhar.

Despite some stinging quips he tended to make upon introduction, Robert was thoroughly kind. I once saw him, from a distance, giving money and a sincerely friendly smile to a beggar in front of the Russell Square Tube station. And another time I saw him carrying home a life-size cardboard cut-out of a man, a Kodak advert, for an elderly woman neighbour. He took friends and visitors to SSEES out for dinner at his own expense, and the waiters in the restaurants — like the Greek on the corner of Coram Street and Woburn Place, the Italian down Southampton Row, and the Indian in Woburn Walk — used to greet him with a warm 'Good evening, Professor!' or 'Good evening, Robert!'. When Karel Brušák was dying in hospital, in 2004, Robert visited him several times. Robert engaged in lively conversations with almost everyone whom he encountered in the course of the day. 'I've just met the kindest, most knowledgeable cabbie!' he might say. Or he would praise the doctors and nurses and dentists and dental assistants after every appointment. 'He/She was splendid. From Sudan/Pakistan. I asked him/her if his/her name meant....'

After I left SSEES for a second time, in 1994, Robert and I kept in regular touch. When he came to Prague he often stayed at my *panelák* sublet in Hlubočepy (bringing his supply of Finlandia and Benson & Hedges) and, after I married Marzia, he stayed at our flat in Bubeneč. As he had been for other friends, he was best man at my and Marzia's wedding. When we went to England we would visit him at Brook House. As he did for probably all his visitors, he gave us tours of Kent: St John the Baptist's Church at Penshurst Place, the ancestral home of Sir Philip Sidney, was





a regular stop, but he also took us, with Musca, further afield, to All Saints' in Tudeley, 'the only church in the world', it says on their Website, to have all its twelve windows decorated by Chagall'. He took us to Anne Boleyn's childhood home, Hever Castle, with its magnificent Renaissance gardens. And unless Rosita gave us a marvellous roast pork dinner (Marzia claims the best she's ever eaten) or Robert made several pies, enough for five times the number of guests, he took us to the George & Dragon (dating from 1212) in Speldhurst, where he continuously compelled us to toss some of the choicest morsels from our plates to Musca. On our last visit to Kent, in 2019, Robert drove us and Musca to Mayfield, then Eastbourne, and Beachy Head, where, in the rain and wind, Marzia and I took Musca up to the top of the chalk cliffs. Robert waited in the car.

Back at Brook House we were given tours of Robert's garden, were told of his battles with the badgers, deer, rabbits, falling fences (repaired with the help of Dan the Handyman), fallen trees (also helped here by Dan), and avaricious developer neighbours. Robert praised the Wellingtonia (known as the giant sequoia where I come from), showed us the flowers and shrubs bought from his local garden centre, and gave us marrows to take home (we colonials — and we outnumber you — call them zucchini and squash, sorry Robert). It was all lovely, but without Rosita it looked lonely and was clearly too much for Robert, even with help offered from Harriet, her husband and two sons.

Well after Robert and the Library (packed with the help of Felix Jeschke, Jana Nahodilová, Marie-Adele Murray, Tim Beasley-Murray, Jan Pospíšil, Peter and Julia Sherwood, Peter Zusi, who has taken over Robert's job at SSEES, and Rajendra) were moved up to Sparrows, a large farm in Gosfield, Essex, I visited him, in May of 2022. Apart from a video provided by Harriet, that was the last time I saw him. Of course I miss Robert, but his presence is so strong, admonishing me for my stupidity, haunting the use of my mother tongue, and urging clearheadedness (which may never come), that it is truly as if he were still with me almost all the time, indeed, with everyone who knew him.

In writing these recollections, I feel like the cow of legend who managed to climb the stairs of the Burton Pynsent Monument in Somerset and then didn't know how to get back down.

The Somerset cow fell to her death. I hope that I have in my own clumsy way made it back down to the ground from the long walk up the tower of reminiscing. And now I can finally go and read things about Robert written by some of his friends who really do have a way with words:

Rajendra Chitnis

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Luboš Merhaut

<http://slovoasmysl.ff.cuni.cz/node/430>

Igor Navrátil

<https://dennikn.sk/3171619/salka-caju-pre-profesora-pynsenta/>

Jan Pospíšil

<http://www.ipsl.cz/index.php?id=2147&menu=e-forum&sub=e-forum&str=text.php>

Julia Sherwood

<https://verzia.doslov.sk/cislo/1-2023/spomienka-na-roberta-pynsenta/>

Daniel Vojtěch

<http://i-kanon.cz/2023/01/05/duchovy-dobrodruh-robert-burton-pynsent/>

Peter Zusi

https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/news/2023/jan/obituary-robert-burton-pynsent-1943-2022?utm_content=buffere3a48&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer

