JIŘÍ MARVAN

1936–2016

FELLOW · ELECTED 1990

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Jiří (George) Marvan was a distinguished linguist and an indefatigable advocate for the Slavic languages in Australian education. He held the Chair of Russian and later of Slavic Languages at Monash University from 1973–91.

Jiří Marvan was born on 28 January 1936 in Prague. He graduated from Charles University, Prague, with a Masters degree in 1959 and a PhD in 1969. His formation as a linguist reflected the influence of the Prague Linguistic School and its members Bohuslav Havránek, Vladimír Skalička and especially his mentor Pavel Trost. Throughout Marvan's life, his favoured scholarly activity remained the discovery and rational exposition, with the aid of the tools of structuralism, of the patterns and rules of language.

Marvan's scholarly career spanned three continents. He worked at the Institute of Czech language of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (1960–63), at Uppsala and Stockholm Universities (1963–67), Portland State University, Oregon (1968–69), the University of California at Davis and at Santa Barbara (1969–72) and at Pennsylvania State University (1972–73). In 1973 he succeeded Zdeněk F. Oliverius, also a Charles University

alumnus, as Professor of Russian at Monash University and embarked on a mission to reshape the discipline of Slavic Studies in Australia, making it relevant to a broader layer of Australian society than had been the case.

Marvan was a prolific scholar and a remarkable linguist, fluent in twelve Slavic languages. His field of expertise encompassed the Baltic languages as well. His publications while at Monash included the books *Modern Lithuanian Declension: A Study of Its Infrastructure* (University of Michigan, 1978), *Prehistoric Slavic Contraction* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), *Pivnichnoslovians′kyi kontekst ukraïns′koï slovozminy* [The North Slavic Context of Ukrainian Inflection] (Knyha, 1983) and *České stupňováni* [Degrees of Comparison in Czech] (Sagner, 1986).

With the Monash classicist Gavin Betts, Marvan prepared an edition of Wenceslaus Johannis Rosa, Čechořečnost seu Grammatica Linguae Bohemicae, Micro-Pragae 1672 [Czech, or a Grammar of the Bohemian Language, Prague, 1672] (Sagner, 1983), and edited or co-edited three scholarly collections, including a tribute to his predecessor in the Monash chair, *In Memoriam Zdeněk F. Oliverius* (Sagner, 1985). He was little inclined to respect the hierarchies of importance suggested by contemporary geopolitical weight or by historical tradition. Indeed, in the cultural and organisational domains adjacent to his scholarly activities, Marvan exhibited during his Monash days a certain partisanship with the historically least favoured and most threatened Slavic languages. He invested much time into editing the works of the Lachian poet Óndra Łysohorsky (1905–89) that ultimately appeared in parallel Lachian, Czech and English texts as *Óndra Łysohorsky: bard swojeho ludu: Euro-lašsky poete = Óndra Łysohorsky: a Euro-Lachian Poet: The Bard of His People* (Moravskoslezsky kraj, 2009). The exhibition 'Belarus and Its Books', which Marvan organised in conjunction with the rare books librarian of the Monash University Library, testified to his care for and interest in the least secure of the three East Slavic languages. A stream of visitors, speakers of various Slavic languages, came to Marvan's door; with each, Marvan spoke his or her native language.

Marvan aspired to reconfigure Australian Slavic Studies, imparting to the discipline a diversity that mirrored its object of inquiry. Taking advantage of the fact that several of his Monash colleagues were competent in

Slavic languages other than Russian, in 1976 Marvan propelled the introduction into the curriculum of Serbo-Croatian (Serbian and Croatian were considered by most scholars at the time to be variants of the one language) and, some years later, Polish and Macedonian. He himself taught special subjects in Czech, Lithuanian and Old Church Slavic.

The most long-lived of the new language programs whose establishment at Monash Marvan facilitated was the Ukrainian, established in 1983 and, today, the only one still in existence. The introduction of Ukrainian was the outcome of one of Marvan's most remarkable attributes: his capacity to interact with partners outside the university to bring about results that were advantageous to scholarship. Leaders of Melbourne's Ukrainian community were dedicated to the idea of a program of Ukrainian Studies at a university in their city, and were prepared to raise funds to finance it. Marvan was their keen ally, advising them in their interactions with university bodies and smoothing the administrative path to the creation of an academic position in Ukrainian Studies. In the final stages of the process to establish Ukrainian, the Department of Russian was renamed the Department of Slavic Languages.

Marvan's transformation of his department took place against the background of his broader strategy to expand the social base of Slavic Studies in Australia. As Marvan saw it, the natural beneficiaries of the new pedagogical offerings in Slavic Studies would be the younger generations of immigrant communities from countries where Slavic languages were spoken. After the Second World War, Australia had received immigrants whom the war had displaced from their homelands in Eastern Europe. A trickle had continued from Yugoslavia. The events of 1968 had resulted in a small number of arrivals from Czechoslovakia, and Polish immigration firmed slightly in the wake of the Solidarity protests of 1980–81. Most of these immigrants had organised themselves into communities and conceived of identity maintenance beyond the settler generation as one of their tasks. All had established community schools. This cultural resource constituted an opportunity that Marvan recognised and was keen to grasp.

Marvan was encouraged in this intention by the dawn of Australian multiculturalism in the 1970s – as an acknowledged social fact, a government policy and a new component of public consciousness. Alongside the creation of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), which began to broadcast radio and television in a large number of languages spoken in Australia, a major institutional symbol of this watershed was the introduction of several languages spoken by immigrant groups as subjects that could be taken for matriculation examinations in various states. Marvan contributed to the latter as a champion of the Slavic and Baltic languages. Documents

in the Monash University Archive reveal the breadth and depth of Marvan's involvement in this process, the heroic committee responsibilities that he shouldered and the detailed advice he gave community activists in order to ensure that their negotiations with the educational bureaucracies of their states would yield the desired results. In 1975 these efforts proved successful and, in Victoria, Czech, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Serbo-Croatian and Ukrainian were added to Russian as subjects for the Higher School Certificate (later the Victorian Certificate of Education). Macedonian and Slovenian followed suit. These languages also became available as matriculation subjects in New South Wales and South Australia.

A similar strategic vision inspired Jiří Marvan's teaching. He enjoyed teaching undergraduates, having an eye to their potential as doctoral candidates several years in the future. Taking into account students' background knowledge, their pre-existent interests and their native skills, Marvan would nurture and develop their engagement with Slavic Studies and encourage them to think of research in the discipline as a fulfilling and valuable activity. The clarity of Marvan's structural vision which characterised him as a scholar extended to his teaching style. He had the capacity to rapidly order the facts of a linguistic system into a logical structure, normally with scant regard for pre-existing textbook traditions, and to organise the outcome into a transparent course of study, not infrequently generating a teaching handbook in the process. For the student with a predisposition to rational thought he was a revelatory and empowering teacher: he taught that the chaos of phenomena could be coaxed by the reasoning and observing mind to yield its inner order.

Marvan's colleague Leslie Bodi, Professor of German at Monash University and, like Marvan, a scholar born and educated in Central Europe, liked to remark on the variety of roles in which a head of department at an English-speaking university was expected to excel: gentleman scholar, manager, advocate for his discipline within the university and outside it, teacher to students, mentor to colleagues, larger-than-life personality. Marvan was all of these things. The correspondence files from his period of headship reflect the range of his professional interactions. Political figures and government departments are urged to acknowledge the significance of languages in general and Slavic languages in particular, and to take appropriate action. Materials about the Monash Slavic department and its successes are supplied to the press. Innumerable questions of detail are transacted with state education bureaucracies. Funds to support research are sought from a variety of granting bodies. The co-operation of community organisations is solicited in the cause of new university language programs. Arrangements are made to receive

foreign visitors. Contacts are upheld, and new ones are found, with scholars abroad. The scope of the activity is paralleled by the novelty of many of the courses of action envisaged.

In the end, Marvan's vision was too comprehensive and too ambitious for the environment in which he sought to realise it. Neither spontaneous social demand nor government policy provided a material base for an Australian florescence of Slavic Studies as he envisaged it. Limited student numbers, pressure on university budgets and a new managerialism in the university sector combined to engender a trend toward large composite schools of languages and away from autonomous departments based on the traditional philological disciplines. At Monash one of the first steps in this direction was the creation in 1990 of a Department of German Studies and Slavic Studies. It was a step of which Jiří Marvan could not approve, and few were surprised when, in 1991, he parted from Monash and returned permanently to Europe, making his native Prague his home once again.

As the post-Soviet transformation proceeded in Central Europe, Marvan embraced a new role: in 1994–97 he served as the Czech Republic's first ambassador to Greece. He also resumed his academic work, teaching at Charles University, where in 2005 that university's professorial title was conferred upon him, and at other Czech universities. He continued to champion languages with small communities of speakers within a cognitive and ethical framework that he dubbed 'linguoecology' and that is in evidence in his book, intended for a broad audience, *Introducing Europe to Europeans Through Their Languages* (School of Czech Studies, 2008).

Nominated by Jiří Neustupny, Professor of Japanese at Monash University, and seconded by Reginald de Bray, who had been Monash's founding Professor of Russian, and Michael Clyne, then Professor of Linguistics at the same university, Marvan was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1990, at the very end of his sojourn in Australia. The honours bestowed upon him included the Gold Cross of Merit, conferred by the President of Poland, and a decoration within the Order of the Grand Duke Gediminas, conferred by the President of Lithuania. Marvan's 70th birthday was marked by a festschrift, *Europeica – Slavica – Baltica: Jiřímu Marvanovi k 70. narozeninám*, ed. by Helena Petáková and Hana Opleštilova (Národní knihovna České republiky, 2007).

Jiří Marvan died on 13 April 2016. He is survived by his wife, PhDr Mira Marvanova, their son Jiří, and his two children by an earlier marriage to Elishka Marvan: Dr Elishka Marvan and Tomas Marvan. His funeral service was held on 22 April 2016 in the Evangelical church of St Clement in Prague.

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