
Professor Walter Pape awarded doctorate honoris causa from Charles University

Professor Walter Pape awarded doctorate honoris causa from Charles University

On April 7, 2010, the leading European German philologist and literary scientist and professor of the University of Cologne, Walter Pape, received a Doctorate Honoris Causa of Philosophy. The university's promotor, prof. Zdeněk Beneš, awarded Walter Pape with the doctorate on the grounds of his contribution to the Czech-German relations in the fields of culture, science and education. The ceremony was a part of the celebrations of the 662nd anniversary of the foundation of Charles University.

In his lecture, Walter Pape spoke about language as a medium of literature. The professor also turned his attention to the relationship between the real world and the world of language: "The sign system can only mislead us, if we believe in a fixed relation between the sign and the its denotation. Neither literature nor language can have blind faith in such a relation, even though in everyday life, we need this faith in order to survive."

He proceeded to talk about the potential of language for metaphorical expression using examples from notes and letters by Franz Kafka, who wrote: "Almost no word I write fits well with another one, I can hear the consonants grating against each other and vowels singing like negroes at an exhibition."*

Prof. Dr. Walter Pape was born in Magdeburg in 1945. He studied German and English philology and political science at the University of Heidelberg. In 1972, he finished his doctorate and eight years later, he became assistant professor. His academic career is however linked to the University of Cologne, where he became professor in 1988 and was the head of the Faculty of Arts in the years 1997 – 2003. He was a visiting professor at the University of California San Diego and Santa Barbara in 1983 and 1985, respectively. In 2000 professor Pape became a member of the Academic Senate in charge of relations between the University of Cologne and Charles University.

His academic scope is very broad: besides Enlightenment and Romanticism-era literature, he also did work on 19th and 20th century novel. He is a leading authority in the field of theory of comedy and the comical in literature and political poetry. Among his numerous published works, we can find monographs on Wilhelm Busch, Joachim Ringelnatz and a series on publications on Heidelberg and Berlin Romanticism. Professor Pape is also the editor of the series such as European Cultures: Studies in Literature and the Arts, published by the Walter De Gruyter, Berlin, New York.

Footnotes:

*15.XII 10

Translation: Jaroslav Švelch