

Johannes Urzidil: Letters to Wilfred Jonckheere

From 1957 to 1961 I studied "Germanic languages" at the University of Ghent in Belgium. In my third year I decided to take Dutch and German as my majors and to write a final year a "thesis" as it was called then, about Johannes Urzidil whose "Die verlorene Geliebte" I had read. My supervisor was Professor. Dr. Herman Uyttersprot who was very interested in the German pre-war writers, especially Franz Kafka. He also knew that Johannes Urzidil's work would be an interesting subject. That is why he approved my suggestion to make a study of Urzidil and his works. I knew that Urzidil had immigrated to the USA and after I had obtained his address, I wrote a letter to him to tell him about my intention to undertake a study about him and his works. It wasn't long until I got a very enthusiastic reply from him which is in the collection. That was the start of my correspondence with him. He was always very keen to answer my questions and to send me some of his publications and supply information that I couldn't get anywhere else.

I also travelled to Prague in 1959 when it was still under communist domination. I wanted to acquaint myself with Urzidil's former hometown and its surroundings which helped me a lot to understand his writings and his feelings as a writer in exile. While I was there, I also met professors Ladislav Heger, Hugo Siebenschein and Karl Krejci who were kind enough to give me important background information on the author. At some stage I also had the privilege of meeting Urzidil and his wife Gertrud in person when he was on a lecture tour in Germany which helped me to appreciate his warm personality. When my study was completed in June 1961, I sent it to him which he appreciated very much although he couldn't understand it fully as it was written in Dutch. To my knowledge, it was the first study on him and his work. It was of an explorative nature trying to situate him and his work in the context of his time and contemporaries.

Em. Prof. **Wilfred Jonckheere**
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