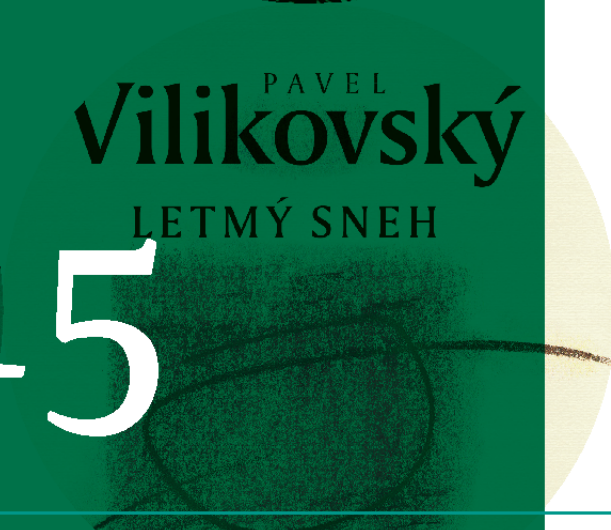
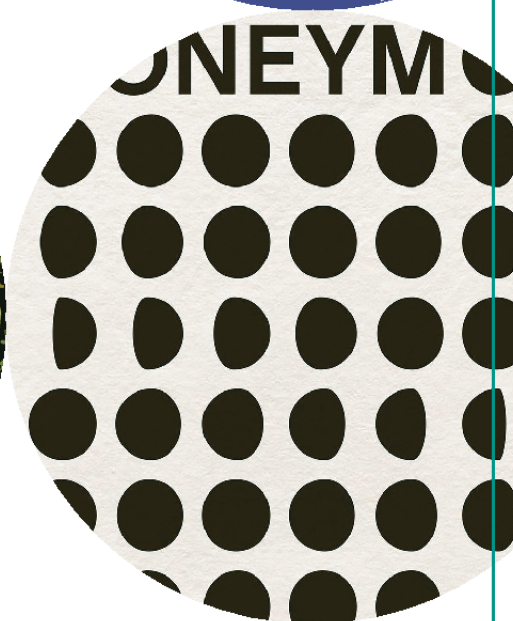


Centre
for Information
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Bratislava



Books from Slova- kia



Balla

The Big Love

Balla's new book will amuse the reader with its irony and black humour, its constant debasing of so-called "lofty" themes and its observations on relationships between men and women, parents and children, the individual and society. Although infused with sadness and melancholy, The Big Love is a profoundly wise and human book.

The main characters in *The Big Love* are Laura and Andrič. Andrič is an ageing forty-something who has been a clerk all his working life. He is very literary in a variety of ways: he reads, takes notes, writes creatively—he is a writer. And he thinks a lot, often rather deeply. Andrič knows that his relationship with Laura is going nowhere. He likes his solitude; it is his comfort zone, albeit a rather sad and desolate one. Laura, on the other hand, is an unusually active woman, which she has to be because she is on her own with a young daughter. She has to earn, come to terms with her difficult past, look for a suitable partner, think that she has found him, later decide (quite rightly) that he isn't suitable and then, in the interests of her family—i.e. daughter—refuse him.

“The Big Love is mostly about its absence and about how we mistake other feelings and emotions for such love. A man and woman look for a way of living together but he basically gives up at the very start. The book’s title is intended to trap the reader: instead of love, the book talks about estranged people in today’s very strange world.”



PHOTO (C) LUCIA GARDIN

Vladimír Balla (1967)

The prose writer using the pen name Balla, a highly original voice on Slovakia’s literary scene, is the author of absurdist short stories populated by a gallery of lonely, alienated and weird individuals unable to relate to other human beings and undergoing bizarre, often creepy experiences. A recipient of several literary awards, Balla shuns the spotlight and continues to live in the provincial town of Nové Zámky where he works as a local official. He published the first of his seven short story collections, *Leptokaria*, which received the Ivan Krasko Prize for a début, in 1996. In 2011 Balla published a short prose work with autobiographic features *V mene otca* (In the Name of the Father). Prose works *Oko* (Eye, 2012) and *Veľká láska* (The Big Love, 2015) followed.

Translated titles:

CZECH:

Naživu **(Alive)**

A collection of short stories.
Zlín: Kniha Zlín, Ing. Marek Turňa, 2008

DUTCH:

In de naam van de vader **(In the Name of the Father)**

Rotterdam: Uitgeverij Douane, 2013

POLISH:

Podszepty **(Prompting)**

A collection of short stories.
Wrocław: Biuro literackie, 2012

Świadek **(The Witness)**

A collection of short stories.
Wrocław: Biuro literackie, 2011

Nepokój **(Anxiety)**

A collection of short stories.
Sejny: Pogranicze, 2008

SLOVENIAN:

Dvosamljenost **(Double-loneliness)**

A collection of short stories.
Ljubljana: Apokalipsa, 2005

Balla ***Veľká láska***

Published by:
Koloman Kertész Bagala
Levice, 2015, 144 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8108-054-8



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Jana Beňová

HoneymOon

*Separately spent
honeymoon? Such
a bizarre beginning
to a marriage...*

The main characters in *HoneymOon* are a woman, a man, a vision and a leg—as well as many of the despised Trabants abandoned by East Germans on their journey westwards through the streets of Budapest. It is a book about what the first weeks of marriage are like when each partner spends them in a different place. Oona, a girl lying in hospital, decides to start writing a diary. In the country around her huge changes are taking place. Older memories mix with her daily records, the first person narrative mixes with the third, the time before her illness with her notes from hospital. After reading it several times her lover, Maté, adds his own notes to her diary.

“A honeymoon which the newly-weds spend in separate places. Such a bizarre beginning to a marriage, it is actually a thriller—a book with a secret that can change your whole interpretation of the story just before the very end. But such, indeed, is life.”



PHOTO (C) VLADIMÍR ŠIMÍČEK

Jana Beňová (1974)

Poet and prose writer, she graduated from the Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts in Bratislava. Her debut, a collection of poems, *Svetloplachý* (Lucifugous), appeared in 1993. Next came out two collections of poems, both in 1997: *Lono-chod* (Wombokhod) and *Nehota* (Loveful Naked). Just as her debut, these, too, are a “travelogue” of interpersonal relationships, loves, details and life observations. A prose work, *Parker* (*Lúboštný román*) / *Parker* (A Love Story, 2001), and a collection of short stories, *Dvanásť poviedok a Ján Med* (Twelve Stories and Ján Med, 2003), followed. The book of short stories is marked by sensibility bound with a poignant, peculiar insight into the human mind and behaviour. Her next prose work, *Plán odprevádzania* (Seeing People Off, 2008), subtitled *Café Hyena*, is a peculiar mosaic made of mini-stories, observations, perceptions, self-reflections and memories, amidst which emerges a relationship between a young woman and an ageing man. The second edition of this novel with reversed title: *Café Hyena* (*Seeing People Off*), published in 2012, received the EU Prize for Literature. The same year Beňová’s latest prose work, *Preč! Preč!* (Away! Away!), appeared. Her latest prose work is *HoneymOon* (2015).

Translated titles:

CZECH:

Café Hyena (plán vyprovázení)
Café Hyena (Seeing People Off)
 Praha: Nakladatelství Paseka, 2010

CROATIAN:

Café Hyene. Plan pracenja
Café Hyena (Seeing People Off)
 Zagreb: Hena com, 2014

FRENCH:

Café Hyene. Un plan d’accompagnement
Café Hyena (Seeing People Off)
 Charenton-le-pont: Le Ver a Soie,
 Virginie Symaniec éditrice, 2015

GERMAN:

Parker (Roman)
Parker (A Novel)
 Leipzig: ERATA Literaturverlag, 2008

Abhauen!

(Preč! Preč!)
 St. Pölten—Salzburg—Wien:
 Residenz Verlag, 2015

Jana Beňová
HoneymOon

Published by:
 Marenčin PT, Bratislava, 2015, 128 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8114-452-3



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Jaroslava Blažková

Nylon Moon

Blažková's unconventional heroine, insisting on the "freedom of choice" also in erotic matters, represented a remarkable step forward in what used to be called the "emancipation" of fictional heroines. The revolt of young heroines against the conventions of the times was the central theme of Blažková's books.

Nylon Moon begins in the untraditional setting of a cemetery. Andrej is an architect and meets Vanda, a clerk, at a funeral. Although he has seen her before, it is only at the funeral that he finds the courage to talk to her. And then he falls in love with her despite the fact he already has a girlfriend, Draha. He then tells Draha he is in love with Vanda and their relationship ends. Because Andrej lives with his parents and Vanda with her sister, their passionate meetings take place in parks and dark places outside the house gates. Because they feel their lack of privacy is stopping them developing their relationship, they go on a skiing trip to the Tatras where their love can blossom. Andrej, however, though a nice and ambitious young man, proves not to be the whirlwind in her life Vanda was hoping for. After a few days in the Tatras, Vanda finds out that for all his good qualities, he is, in fact, rather boring...

“In Slovakia, I have had some very pleasant and enjoyable encounters with friends and readers. Many readers, both young and old, know my books from the 1960s. For me that is greatly motivating. I also want to write because without writing, I don’t feel I’m fully alive ... I would like to write a story which gives me a feeling of happiness as I’m writing it. And then be able to transfer that feeling to others.”

Jaroslava Blažková (1933)

This Slovak writer, who in spite of living most of her life in emigration in Canada, belongs among the significant Slovak authors. She studied at the Philosophical Faculty of Comenius University and from 1954 she was a journalist on the staff of the daily *Smena*. In 1956 she was dismissed from the editorial staff for political reasons. At this time she was banned from publishing her work, but after 1958, with the arrival of a political “thaw”, the embargo on publishing her was lifted. In the early sixties she belonged among the most important authors in *Mladá Tvorba* (Young Writing), a magazine which at the end of the fifties opened up space for the young literary generation. In 1968, after the occupation of Czechoslovakia, she emigrated to Canada and her family settled in Toronto. In Canada she also worked for the well-known exile publishing house of Josef Škvorecký’s *68 Publishers*. Since 1989 she has several times visited Slovakia, where her books started to appear again. She is well known not only as the author of avant-garde novels from the sixties, such as *Nylonový mesiac* (Nylon Moon, 1961) or *Jahniatko a grandí* (The Lamb and the Grandees, 1964) but also for her books for children like *Tóno, ja a mravce* (Tony, Me and the Ants, 1961), *Ostrov kapitána Hašašara* (Captain Hashashar Island, 1964) and *Môj skvelý brat Robinson* (My Wonderful Brother Robinson, 1968). Her latest books for children are *Minka a pyžaminka* (Minka and the Pyjama Girl, 2003) and *Traja nebojsovia a duch Miguel* (Three Daredevils and the Ghost Miguel, 2003) and a book of memoirs *Happyendy* (Happyends, 2005).

Translated titles:

BULGARIAN:

Gradinite na zemnite nasladi
(The Garden of Earthly Pleasures)
Sofia: Matom, 2002

Trimata smelčaci i duchat Migel
(Three Daredevils and the Ghost Miguel)
Sofia: Haini, 2006

HUNGARIAN:

Hepiend
(Happyends)
Okoč: AB-ART, 2014



PHOTO (C) PETER PROCHÁZKA

Jaroslava Blažková
Nylonový mesiac

Published by:
Slovenský spisovateľ, Bratislava,
1961 (First edition), 216 p.

Translation Rights:
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lita@lita.sk

Peter Krištúfek

Emma and the Death's-Head Hawkmoth

The photograph of a general, a butterfly, an old song and a face cream advert with a beautiful woman on a beach: the world on the other side of a wall. Little Šimon must hide during the war. He is alone and all he can do is dream. A novella you will not put down till you have finished it.

After the novel, *Dom hluchého* (House of the Deaf Man, 2012) and the conceptual book, *Atlas zabúdania* (Atlas of Forgetting, 2013), Peter Krištúfek again returns to questions of Slovakia's stormy and chequered history in his slim novella, *Emma a Smrtihlav* (Emma and the Death's-Head Hawkmoth). The setting this time is the Slovak state of the 1940s, a period of great cruelty towards various minorities—and one in which little Šimon suddenly becomes a minority all by himself. He has to hide in a pigsty at his mother's friend's house and has no freedom of movement, can only go out on moonless nights and even then must stay within the little yard. As he has nothing with him except a few picture magazines, he has to rely on his daydreams to get him through—and gradually these start to blend with reality. Just behind the wall, the beautiful and perfect Emma is lying on an eternally sunny beach in her yellow swimsuit; General Death's-Head Hawkmoth is also there. The story of a cruel era or a fairy tale for adults? Readers must decide for themselves.

“Emma and the Death’s-Head Hawkmoth is about how imagination can save lives. It is also a metaphor for our contemporary world, not just in times of war; occasionally we all need to escape for a while. Another of my purposes in writing it was to write a playful book about terrible times. Next year I plan to make the film version.”



Peter Krištúfek (1973)

Krištúfek is a prose writer, poet, script-writer and filmmaker. He is an author of three collections of short stories and three novels. His novel *Šepkár* (The Prompter, 2008), an absurdist parody of social mores, was nominated for the EU Prize for Literature and for the Anasoft Litera Prize 2008, the most prestigious literary prize in Slovakia. His second novel, *Blíženci a protinožci* (Gemini and Antipodeans, 2010) displays an original poetic vision, combined with elements of mystery and collage, and it was short-listed for the Anasoft Litera Prize 2010. His latest novel, *Dom hluchého* (House of the Deaf Man, 2012), brings the turbulent history of 20th century Slovakia through the narration of a father and son. The title has been short-listed for Anasoft Litera Prize 2012. In 2013 a conceptual book *Atlas zabúdania* (Atlas of Forgetting) appeared followed by *Ema a smrtihlav* (Emma and Death’s-Head Hawkmoth) in 2014. Both books go back to the period of WWII in Slovakia.

Translated titles:

ARABIC:

Bajt al asam

(The House of the Deaf Man)

Lattakia: Dar Al Hiwar Publishing and Distributing, will be published in 2015

BULGARIAN:

Blizki i protivopoložni

(The Gemini and Antipodeans)

Veliko Tarnovo: Faber, 2013

CZECH:

Dům hluchého

(The House of the Deaf Man)

Brno: Větrné mlýny, 2015, will be published in 2015

ENGLISH:

The House of the Deaf Man

Cardigan: Parthian, 2014

POLISH:

Dom głuchego

(The House of the Deaf Man)

Wrocław: Książkowe Klimaty, 2015

RUSSIAN:

Sufler

(The Prompter)

Moscow: MIC, 2015

Peter Krištúfek
Ema a Smrtihlav

Published by:
Artforum, Bratislava 2014, 72 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8150-079-4



Translation Rights:

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Pavol Rankov

On the Other Side

The master of mysterious storytelling returns with his new collection. Rankov has divided the texts of his new book into two stylistically distinct parts, seemingly contradictory, both of which finish unexpectedly.

Inspired by great writers and their fictional worlds, Rankov creates his own literary labyrinth in his book, *On the Other Side*. Springing from a wide cultural tradition, his stories have echoes of Oriental narratives and the Bible, though not in the moralistic sense but more in terms of their potential, richness and narrative variety. These words apply to the first part of the book. When we turn it over, however, we find something very different.

In this part we read stories of everyday life. These are stories with a very clear point and although fictional, could happen to anyone. In each story Rankov shows how skilfully he can work with language. Regardless of whether the main character is a teenager or an adult, their mannerisms are natural, authentic, and show that Rankov is not just an excellent writer but also a good listener and observer of the interaction between people of different ages.

The magical atmosphere of the book is enhanced by illustrations by Ivan Titor. He divides the book into halves so that it can be looked at from both sides.

“I wanted the reader to be confronted with two worlds—the post-modern present with its fast pace, internet slang and the absence of values, as opposed to the old world based on unchanging traditions and myths determining life and death of people.”

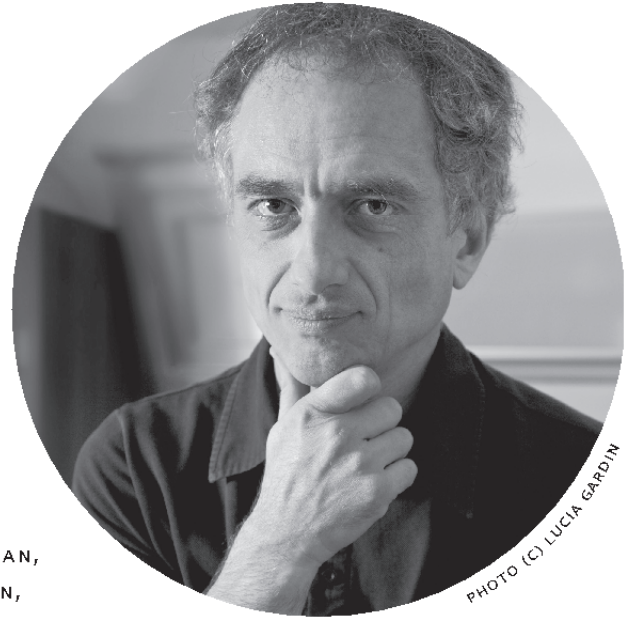


PHOTO (C) LUCIA GARDIN

Pavol Rankov (1964)

Rankov is a prose writer, essayist and journalist. He is the author of three collections of short stories. His debut, *S odstupom času* (At a Distance in Time, 1995), follows up the tradition of fantastic realism. Rankov employs elements of mystery, mystification, irrationality and, typically for him, a startling punchline. This collection was awarded the Ivan Krasko Prize for the best debut and in 1997 the Jean Monnet Premio Letterario Internazionale.

In 2008 his first novel, *Stalo sa prvého septembra (alebo inokedy)* / It Happened on September 1, (or Another Time), appeared. It brings a story of three friends, a Czech, a Jew and a Hungarian, and their love for one girl. The storyline goes throughout three decades (1938–1968), highlighting some of the most important dates in that period of Slovak history—the Munich Treaty, Vienna Arbitration, WWII, Nazi occupation, arrival of the Red Army... and ends in 1968 with the occupation of Slovakia by the allied armies of the Warsaw Pact. This novel was awarded the EU Prize for Literature 2009. Rankov's second novel, *Matky* (Mothers), appeared in 2011. It examines motherhood in the extreme conditions of a Soviet Gulag after the WWII. In 2013 a new collection of short stories by Rankov was published under the title *Na druhej strane* (On the Other Side), confirming again the author's skills and mastery in short-story writing.

Translated titles:

ARABIC, BULGARIAN, CROATIAN, CZECH, GERMAN, HUNGARIAN, MACEDONIAN, POLISH:

Stalo sa prvého septembra (alebo inokedy)

It Happened on September 1 (or Another Time)

ARABIC, BULGARIAN, CZECH, POLISH, SLOVENIAN:

Matky (Mothers)

ARABIC, HUNGARIAN:

V tesnej blízkosti (In Close Vicinity)

BULGARIAN, HUNGARIAN:

S odstupom času (After Some Time)

POLISH:

Bratysława jest mała (Bratislava Is Small)

Collected short stories.

Pavol Rankov
Na druhej strane

Published by:
Artforum
Bratislava, 2013, 172 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8150-031-2



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Ondrej Štefánik

Ostrich Man

The book Ostrich Man is a collection of stories about the taming of Kraken, love, anger, voices in the head, unpredictable toys and a Darkness which says nothing.

These stories are united by the theme of spatial solitude, especially of people who, according to Maslow's and other pyramids of needs, should be at their most content. Instead however, they drift around depressed by the state of the world. Some stories border on sci-fi in their treatment of technological progress but it is only the sci-fi of the near future. In the stories we see these distinctive characters during breakpoints in their lives and watch as they try to find ways out of the existential crises they're going through.

The book presents an absurd palette of possible escape routes via religion, professional success, madness, love and even radical change of personality. The invention and absurd depiction of events is deeply ironic with everything from contemporary art, the consumer society, loss of orientation and bare existence being treated in the same way. Dominated by the bizarre, the anxious and the fantastical, these stories are dynamic and fast moving.

“Some of today’s phenomena, together with observation of them, can lead to great inner confusion. Writing is for the author a constructive way of coming to terms with this, and of minimizing the impact of such confusion on his mental health.”

Ondrej Štefánik (1978)

A graduate of the Philosophical Faculty of Comenius University, made his debut with a book of short stories, *Pštrosí muž* (Ostrich Man) in 2011. Novel *Bezprsté mesto* (Fingerless City) followed in 2012 and has been shortlisted for the prestigious Anasoft Litera Prize 2013. For some years Štefánik has been professionally involved in advertising and holds many awards for creativity.



Ondrej Štefánik
Pštrosí muž

Published by:
Vydavateľstvo Gorila,
Bratislava 2011, 200 p.

ISBN 978-80-9705-780-0



Translation Rights:
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Michaela Rosová

Dandy

If you get lost in the right part of Berlin, you may come across an impudent young fop. Though he is short and slight, you won't miss him in his bright red top hat. And if he is in a good mood, he may show you some secret places, buy you some good champagne and tell you something about his life, the life of a dandy...

The novella *Dandy* is set in modern day Berlin, a city which has recently become a new centre of progressive culture with an atmosphere which attracts poets, playwrights, musicians and multimedia artists, rather as Paris used to early in the last century. Together with the female narrator, the central character in the story is Ole—the dandy of the title—an eccentric Berliner who always wears a red top-hat and likes to provoke those around him with his temperament and bizarre behaviour. We don't know the narrator's name, though Ole sometimes calls her *Prinzessin* (princess). The story has a simple plot: she has left Britain and the four-year relationship which she had there; in Germany she has met him. The narrative is made up of fragments of memories from childhood, descriptions of Ole's peculiar habits and moods, but above all of the feelings of a young girl caught up in an intense but extremely empty relationship. This relationship is the central theme and slowly leads the narrator to reflect on her own rootlessness. The conversations they have are the nicest déjà vu of lovers who never have enough time in which to tell each other everything. Rosová adopts a cultivated approach towards taboo subjects and shows great skill with naturalistic motifs in her work.

“Dandy is so thoroughly honed, I am plainly satisfied with it. I think I would not change much even today.”

Michaela Rosová (1984)

Having studied Theatre and Drama in Brno and Bristol, she now lives in Prague and works as a project coordinator in a translation company. Twice she has been finalist in the *Poviedka* (Short Story) competition (2005 a 2006) and also won a prize in the *Román* (Novel) 2006 competition. Her creative work often lyricizes her own personal experiences and offers the comparison of an idyllic childhood with life today. With her book *Dandy* (2011) she was an Anasoft Litera Prize finalist. Her debut novel was *Hlava nehlava* (Pell Mell, 2009), her latest book the novella *Malé Vianoce* (Little Christmas, 2014).



PHOTO (C) MICHAL BURZA

Michaela Rosová
Dandy

Published by:
Koloman Kertész Bagala
a literarnyklub s.r.o.,
Bratislava, 2011, 108 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8108-028-9



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Veronika Šikulová

Places in the Net

Places in the Net is a three-generation novel. “Big” history—World War II, the communist takeover, political trials etc.—unfolds against the backdrop of “little” stories of a single large family.

In the autobiographically based novel *Places in the Net* Veronika Šikulová concentrates on the fates of three women from one family: the grandmother, Jolana, her daughter, Alica, and her granddaughter, Verona, who, influenced by their sad but resilient lives, tries to come to terms with their sorrows and confusions and find through them her “place in the network” and equilibrium within herself. Her narrative recalls the colours, smells and tastes of the past, along with the various characters and public figures of a bygone world; it also touches on human tragedies, both minor and major, caused by historic events such as war and the rise of totalitarianism. Her novel is not just a story about history with a capital H and its impact on everyday lives, however, but is a novel in which strong women open up to the reader, women who, when losing everything, are forced to rely on themselves, must find the courage to go on living and looking after their near ones.

“Places in the Net is a book about us, about ‘Slovaks from the south’, about women, about brave and resourceful men, about our family, my grandmother and her sisters, my mother and father, about me, about work that forms a key part of all our lives, about love, of which there is really very little, and about writing. This novel was important for me both in terms of my work and in terms of my humanity.”

Veronika Šikulová (1967)

Šikulová is a prose writer and journalist. Her debut work, a collection of sketches and portraits of family members, *Odtiene* (Shades, 1997), received the Ivan Krasko Award for the best debut of the year. Her second book, *Z obloka* (From the Window, 1999), focuses entirely on the theme of the family. Šikulová shows great skill in switching between narrative styles, oscillating between a serious and witty tone and treating the reader as an equal partner. Šikulová’s further works of fiction, *Mesačná dúha* (The Moon Rainbow, 2003) and *Domček jedným ťahom* (A House at a Single Stroke, 2010) build on the themes and genres of her first book. Just as in her earlier writings, a key role is played by the small city of Modra with its smaller, more intimate history as opposed to larger-scale history of the world beyond. After a few more collections of short prose works she wrote her first novel *Miesta v sieti* (Places in the Net, 2011), a three-generation family saga. The novel does not aspire to be historical or historicizing. The author simply wants to tell the story of her family, using authentic documents, letters from the front and from prison, as well as routine correspondence between individual characters. Her latest prose works are *Freska v dome* (Fresco in the House, 2014) and *Medzerový plod* (Blank-spaced Fruit, 2014) which has recently received the Anasoft Litera Prize 2015.

Translated titles:

CZECH:
Miesta v sieti
(Places in the Net)
Argo, Praha, 2015



PHOTO (C) PETER PROCHÁZKA

Veronika Šikulová
Miesta v sieti

Published by:
Slovart, Bratislava, 2011, 336 p.

ISBN: 978-80-5560-271-4



Translation Rights:
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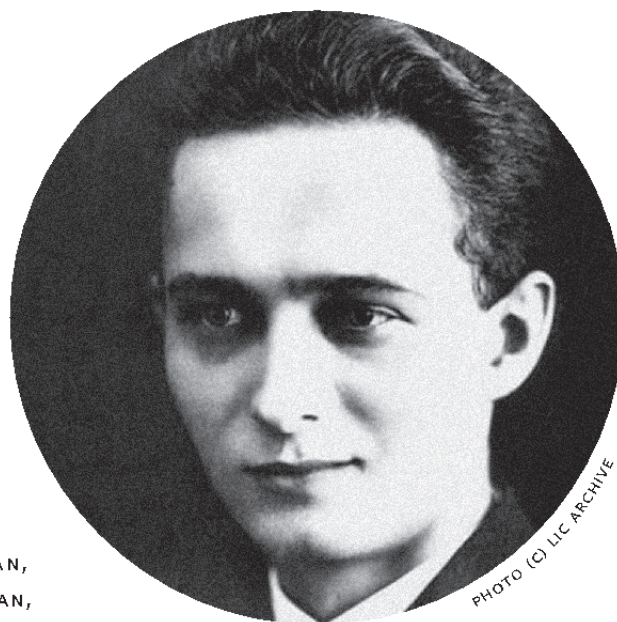
Milo Urban

The Living Whip

Urban's novel The Living Whip depicts a very simple person, one who is unaware of his state in a new social situation. The phenomenon of war was something unknown to him and for a time he becomes part of the great war machine, under the pressure of which many individuals inevitably succumbed.

The novel presents a picture of the First World War (at that time known as The Great War). The veracity of this canvas is in its presentations of human life experiencing tragedies of war far from the trenches—in the mountain village of Ráztoky. Urban saw the Slovak village involved in a dynamic process of change. He was the first one to point out the resulting atomization of village culture. The world before the war entered the village was markedly different from the world in which the war made itself at home. The allegorical arrival of war in the village is one of the great moments in *The Living Whip*. In this novel, an expressionist transformation takes place. The fairy-tale world of the village, where myth and legend reside, is gradually replaced by a world of harsh and deadly truths, a delirious, corrupt, and destructive world normally associated with the city. Urban achieved this transformation through the use of striking imagery.

“I felt that I was swimming in foreign waters, that I was improvising and imitating. At the same time, something was whispering to me, telling me that those waters must have an end—that if I didn’t give up, I would successfully cross them and find myself and my own voice.”



Milo Urban (1904–1982)

Prose writer, journalist and translator, belongs among the best representatives of modern Slovak literature. In 1921–1940 he worked as an editor and reporter with various dailies and magazines, and was chief editor of the daily *Gardista* (1940–1945). Close to the end of WWII he emigrated to Austria, but in 1947 he was returned to Czechoslovakia and brought to court for trial. In 1948 a people’s court sentenced him to public censure for his newspaper activities during the war. From then he earned his living mostly by translation.

He entered the literary scene at the age of 16 with a short story *Ej, ten tanec* (What a Dance!, 1920). Best known besides his masterpiece, *The Living Whip*, are his novellas *Jašek Kutliak spod Bučinky* (Jašek Kutliak from beneath Bučinka, 1922,) and *Za vyšným mlynom* (Behind the Upper Mill, 1926). Urban masterfully depicted the life of mountain villagers in the 1920s and 1930s.

Translated titles:

BULGARIAN, FRENCH, GERMAN, HUNGARIAN, POLISH, RUSSIAN, SERBIAN-CROATIAN, SLOVENIAN:

Živý bič
(**The Living Whip**)

ARABIC, LATVIAN, ROMANIAN:

Za vyšným mlynom
(**Behind the Upper Mill**)

HUNGARIAN:

Zelená krv
(**Green Blood**)

LITHUANIAN:

Triptych o láske
(**Triptych on Love**)

POLISH:

Výkriky bez ozveny
(**Calls Without Echo**)

Milo Urban

Živý bič

Published by:
L. Mazáč, Praha, 1927

Translation Rights:
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Pavel Vilikovský

Fleeting Snow

The ageing narrator of the novella Fleeting Snow, confronted with the changing times and human frailty, tries to find and express some basic truths about life before it is, as he feels, too late.

It would be nice—but untrue—to say that Pavel Vilikovský's latest novel answers some of life's most basic questions. The main character and narrator merely tries to ask these age-old questions slightly differently, in the way suggested to him by his own experiences. And as we know, a well placed question is half the answer to the question—it is up to us the readers to find the answer. In the process we learn various things about love, avalanches, furs, the soul, birthmarks, Zen Buddhism and, last but not least, bilabial consonants in the language of the Algonquin Indians. Not everything the narrator says can be believed but there is nothing strange about that: sometimes he just says things to get his courage up in a dark and lonely place.

“Fleeting Snow is a free, occasionally humorous, narrative unified by the image of an avalanche symbolizing both an individual and societal loss of memory which threatens to bury both our culture and our whole way of life up till now.”



Pavel Vilikovský (1941)

One of the most outstanding and acclaimed contemporary Slovak literary figures (twice winner of the Anasoft Litera Prize), he is both writer and translator. He studied Slovak and English at the Philosophical Faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava and then worked as the editor of the eminent literary journal, *Romboid*. Writing prose works distinguished by their aesthetic features, multiplicity of meaning and the development of several narratives at the same time, Pavel Vilikovský is a representative of postmodern Slovak literature. Amongst his most important works are the novella *Kôň na poschodí, slepec vo Vrábľoch* (Horse on the First Floor, A Blind Man in Vrábľe, 1989), the short story collection *Krutý strojvodca* (The Cruel Engine Driver, 1996), the novel *Pes na ceste* (Dog on the Road, 2010) and the prose work *Prvá a posledná láska* (First and Last Love, 2013). His latest prose work is novella *Letmý sneh* (Fleeting Snow, 2014).

Translated titles:

ARABIC, CROATIAN,
MACEDONIAN, POLISH, SERBIAN:

Krutý strojvodca
(The Cruel Engine Driver)

BULGARIAN, ITALIAN:
Kôň na poschodí, slepec vo Vrábľoch
(The Horse on the Steps,
The Blind Man in Vrábľe)

ENGLISH, HUNGARIAN,
MACEDONIAN, SERBIAN:
Posledný kôň Pompejí
(The Last Horse of Pompeii)

FRENCH, ITALIAN,
POLISH, ROMANIAN:
Večne je zelený
(Forever Green Is...)

CZECH, ITALIAN:
Čarovný papagáj a iné gýče
(The Magic Parrot and Other Kitsch)

HUNGARIAN:
Vlastný životopis zla
(A Biography of Evil)

CZECH:
Pes na ceste
(Dog on the Road)

CZECH, POLISH:
Príbeh ozajského človeka
(The Story of a Real Man)

Pavel Vilikovský
Letmý sneh

Published by:
Slovart, Bratislava, 2014, 144 p.

ISBN: 978-80-556-0975-1



Translation Rights:
Elena Hudáková
hudakova@slovart.sk

Svetlana Žuchová

Scenes from the Life of M.

M. is Marisia, a young woman on the cusp of childhood and adulthood looking for a place in life after the death of her mother. And as is often the case, home for her is not a place but the people who create it. In finding her home, she goes through many different experiences.

This is the story of Marisia, who, following her mother's death, decides to return to Slovakia from Vienna and to work as a nurse. The novel describes her memories of her mother dying and how she becomes a part of her partner's family. The everyday and banal alternate with exceptional situations—Marisia meets a stepbrother she had known nothing about, for instance—but in the end it is the everyday which triumphs. The main theme of the narrative is family relationships: relationships both new and old, narrow and formal, important and worthless.

“The main themes of the novella Scenes from the Life of M. are parting with one’s childhood and becoming an adult, seeking and finding a home, and the value—or valuelessness—of certain family ties, some of which may be old, others which have been newly acquired.”

Svetlana Žuchová (1976)

Writer and translator. She studied psychology in Vienna and medicine in Bratislava. She works as a psychiatrist in Prague. Apart from writing blogs and publishing in various magazines (Romboid, Rak, Vlna and others), she translates from German and English. She has published a collection of stories *Dulce de Leche* (2003), a novella *Yesim* (2006), the novel *Zlodeji a svedkovia* (Thieves and Witnesses, 2011) and a book *Obrazy zo života M.* (Scenes from the Life of M., 2013). This novel was awarded the EU Prize for Literature 2015.



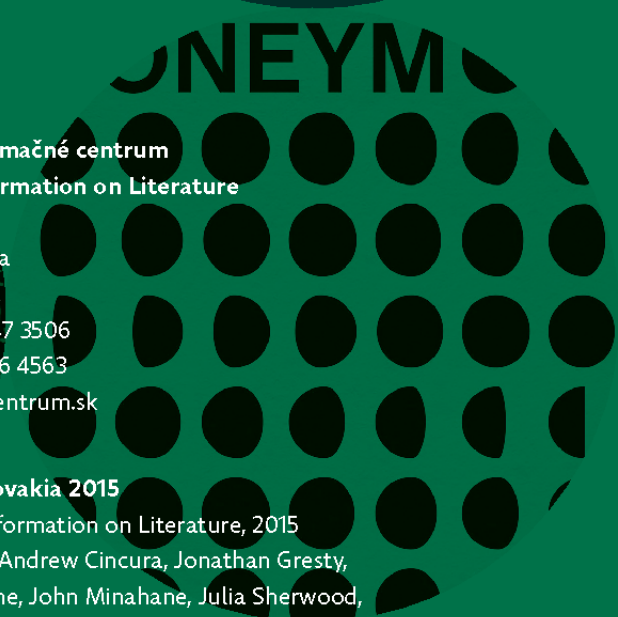
Svetlana Žuchová
Obrazy zo života M.

Published by:
Marenčin PT
Bratislava 2013, 152 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8114-184-3



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Books from Slovakia 2015

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Translations © Andrew Cincura, Jonathan Gresty,

Janet Livingstone, John Minahane, Julia Sherwood,

Julia and Peter Sherwood, Heather Trebatická, 2015.

Graphic Design and Layout © Matúš Lelovský, 2015

Printed in Slovakia by Tlačiareň P + M, Turany.

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B A L L A

V E L K Á L Á S K A

VELKÁ
LÁSKA

YK BAGALA

EXCERPT: TRANSLATED BY HEATHER TREBATICKÁ

He keeled over outside the office.

The doctor said it was just an ordinary fainting fit.

It happens, no one knows when or why.

Just chance?

He looked sadly at the doctor:

“I think they have remote control over me. I can’t describe it exactly, but they don’t want to be described exactly. They switch me off at any time and it’s quite possible that the next time they switch me off they won’t switch me on again. Sometimes we don’t feel we are controlled from outside at all, and I don’t always feel that way, but the fact that I don’t feel anything doesn’t fool me! For, as long as them there need my mind, instructions keep arriving, but then they’ll turn the switch and you will call it Alzheimer, dementia and I don’t know what else. The body that belonged to the mind will be cleared away, buried in the ground, there are rituals for that. Traditions! Doctor, yesterday I saw the film *Stoker*. In one scene the main character, I don’t know why it was in the kitchen, was reading an Encyclopaedia of Funeral Rites. Useful reading, I tell you!”

The doctor patted him on the shoulder:

“You say they are manipulating you, but in fact you just desperately wish they would manipulate you. You’re afraid of the void you would fall into if you realised there is no one above you. How desperately we want someone to be above us! So that atheism as a whole proves to be humbug! We convulsively pass off fear and fallacies as virtues, expressions of humility, respect for traditions, for true knowledge. God, Bach, Lutheranism, Catholicism, values, all that claptrap!”

“They really are using me. And not just my mind. If they feel like it they will take out my organs and send them to Albania. Or rather to Kosovo. That’s why our government doesn’t recognise Kosovo. It wants to protect me. It’s doing what it can. It’s afraid for my components, my liver for example, but it has to keep this secret, within the bounds of what’s permitted by international law, which is why people sometimes get the impression at these press conferences that the government is lying, that the Prime Minister is bad, but he’s good, he’s protecting me, you understand, as a citizen!”

“We’ll examine you, okay? I’ll call the sister. Then we can prescribe you some medicines.”

Jana Beňová

HONEYM ● ●



EXCERPT: TRANSLATED BY JULIA SHERWOOD

Before she set off on her travels Maté gave her a piece of advice: whatever you do, don't get involved with men who are politically aware. The kind that will force you to eat all sorts of pigswill and mouldy bread just because they're wary of throwing out food. The kind who have memorized all the statistics and when you go out to eat, will try to impress you with the exact number of nuclear weapons and starving children in the world. The kind who even in the middle of the night can tell you the exact degree by which the earth's temperature has gone up as a result of global warming, the exact location of melting icebergs and which animal species have altered their original migration routes.

And never get involved with men who wear waistcoats. Said Maté. You never know what's being laced up by that waistcoat, what's being concealed, what's being bound or covered up. What's being held together after having fallen apart long ago. Stopped from breathing, from getting out into the fresh air, kept warm, warmed up, heated up, cooked. Brought to the boil!

She had a lover in Chicago. The next morning, when they got up, he opened his wardrobe and showed her his 150 shirts. He took particular pride in the silk ones. Salmon pink. "Try it, feel it with your fingers!"

Try it! Feel it!

To say nothing of the waistcoats.

Every lover teaches you something. Perfects you. Teaches you to eat fresh basil, read Eliot, cook quinoa, speak other languages.

Every lover prepares you for the one that will follow.

Loneliness & solidarity.

So there I am. Trying to inhabit a new world. One with specific rules, wardrobes filled with levitating clothes. And again I'm being told what belongs where. In this house where all the chocolate is past its sell-by date. As grey as the bones of prehistoric animals. Fragile bones of all the life forms that have become extinct. In a house where earplugs and the face mask that first class passengers get for free shine a fluorescent light into the night. Soft and bushy, slowly and painlessly, the mask transforms the man's face into that of a plush teddybear.

I've been told that one of the saddest things ever is to be alone when something important happens to you.

There are still some creatures who will sit up in their seat curiously when the air hostess demonstrates how to put on the oxygen mask, first your own and only then your child's. They will listen, repeating the safety instructions in their mind. Then their hand gropes underneath their seat to feel for the outlines of the safety vest.



jaroslava
blažková

nylonový mesiac

slovenský spisovateľ



EXCERPT: TRANSLATED BY HEATHER TREBATICKÁ

The deputy was sitting on a bench in the park. It wasn't often that he allowed himself a rest, but this time he did. The spring had drawn him outdoors; he felt in his veins the farmer's blood that made him crouch to touch the soil. He sat with his newspaper open and let the world file past him. People who had died, children who had been born. A flood of monsters in Japan: newborn babies without eyes, with two heads, with fish tails. Strontium shimmering in the sun's rays like invisible snow.

In Brussels the Atomium had been built. Its aluminium balls distorted people's faces. Boys laughed and rode on the merry-go-rounds. A soldier won a toy monkey at a shooting range and gave it to a little girl. Millions of cubic metres of work. The Czechoslovak pavilion was awarded a Gold Medal.

There is always a war going on somewhere in the world.

Birth and death and the space in between—life.

The deputy shut his eyes against the April sun. A steamboat on the Danube hooted and boys played with marbles. Willow trees blossomed on the banks of the river.

On a nearby bench Jozef Paštinský was revelling in his first love, the spring, and also the fact that his father had been kicked out. It meant he would no longer be forced to go to university. He would train to be a typographer; he would do artistic printing. He was talking about this to a girl with a black pony tail and smiling blissfully as he did so.

The deputy noticed that his hand hesitated but was too shy to touch the girl's. Their eyes met and Jozef frowned.

The deputy hid behind his newspaper. He read about refrigerators from Zlaté Moravce and that a first prize had not been awarded in a competition at a hotel in the High Tatras. The second prize was won by the slogan "Spiral in a Blue Triangle", the third by the slogan "Nylon Moon". The deputy lifted his head. Nylon Moon—what a silly idea! The boy and the black-haired girl were no longer on the bench.

At that moment two paths away Vanda was saying to Andrej, "Look, there's no point in going on."

Andrej stared into the water. The current was murky, with broken branches floating in it.

"Every relationship has its climax, after which it just goes on all the same. Or - it goes downhill. And I don't want..."

The first freckles were appearing on her nose and her red hair fell over her pale blue raincoat.

"You've done a lot for me, I know, but what would there be in store for us? Even if we married. Habit, weariness."

EMA

*Peter
Krištúfek*



A

Smrtihlav

Artforum

It wasn't simple. Or cosy.

Simon had to stay closeted in the outhouse. The pigs' stink was pungent and the goats didn't seem much better. Néni Marika used to feed them early in the morning, and in the afternoon she would pour them some fresh water.

He could venture out only at night, and only into the part of the yard that was shielded by the wall. And only if the moon was not shining.

Marika-néni was afraid, because there were Hungarians living everywhere around, or Germans, all of whom were in the Deutsche Partei and were under obligation to inform.

If they noticed anything suspicious or unusual, they were supposed to notify the Gestapo immediately.

Since everything had happened suddenly and they couldn't drag a heavy load with them, Simon's Mama had scarcely been able to pack anything at all, except for a few items of clothing.

No toys, none of the model cars, not even one tin soldier.

During the long, empty, monotonous days he used to play with pebbles that he found at night in the yard, and Néni Sándorfiová had dropped him in a few magazines.

Pictorial, so that at least he'd have something to look at.

One of them was adorned with black-and-white photographs of soldiers. Germans, to all appearances happy to be able to lay down their lives for noble aims.

On a double-page spread there was a line of tanks drawn up before a general with a sharply etched face. He had a skull and crossbones on his cap.

He was actually smiling in a smaller photo alongside.

A few pages further on, right at the top, there was a bright colour advertisement.

It was a painted image of a beautiful woman with thick dark hair sunning herself in a yellow swimsuit on a beach by the sea. She was leaning over coquettishly and rubbing cream on her soft skin.

Simon spelt out the caption beside her: Emma liebt die Sonne!

And beneath that in small letters: NIVEA CREME zur Hautpflege.

2.

A big death's-head hawkmoth caterpillar was crawling into a fissure in the ground, a little way beyond the trough. She was preparing to pupate. Simon knew her: his father had pointed out one like her on the deadly nightshade and once afterwards on the lilac, where she was feeding on flowers and leaves.

Pavol
Rankov

NA

URD

HEJ

ARTS

NE

Artforum

EXCERPT: TRANSLATED BY HEATHER TREBATICÁ

The current combination of annulling entrance visas and strengthening emigration controls has taken on a symbolic significance. They can be seen as a metaphor for emerging class divisions.

(ZIGMUNT BAUMAN – GLOBALIZATION)

Their cohabitation began when Blanka moved into Pietro's flat in Turin. Not Blanka's cohabitation with Pietro, but Blanka's with Antonietta. With Pietro Blanka really only cohabited after dark. He would come back from his firm about seven and they had supper together—Blanka mostly fed him salads, because they can't be overcooked or burnt—then, in accordance with Pietro's bachelor habit, they would get into bed to watch some totalmente stupido television programme such as only one of Berlusconi's television companies is capable of putting on; for example news about the lives of celebrities where, in the role of requisites, peroxide veline in bikinis hang from ropes. The presenter taps them on the head with his finger from time to time and pronounces them to be completely empty. People in the studio find this enormously entertaining, Pietro too. Blanka didn't even know how she would translate the word velina into Slovak.

In the morning Pietro would get up while Blanka was still asleep and prepare breakfast for her; that is, he took yogurt and juice out of the fridge, and woke her with a goodbye kiss. He hurried because he always wanted to be first in the agenzia; he wanted to know what his subordinates were doing.

At the beginning Blanka asked him to wake her as soon as he got up, but Pietro didn't want to. He laughed, saying that when he was Blanka's age, he could also sleep until lunchtime and hated anyone who prevented him from doing so. And as he didn't want Blanka to hate him, he would let her sleep.

Antonietta used to arrive about ten. In the first few days she used to catch Blanka still in her pyjamas. Blanka felt very embarrassed when Antonietta moved round her with a mop or vacuum cleaner and when she sent the dust whirling around her head with that strange, senseless implement that looked as if it was made of peacock feathers. Blanka felt like a parasite, an exploiter oppressing a poor proletarian woman dependant on the couple of hundred euros Pietro paid her for cleaning the flat.

I don't want us to have a servant, Blanka told Pietro immediately after her first meeting with Antonietta. Pietro looked at Blanka in surprise, as if he had failed just once more to understand her broken Italian. Then he began to explain the difference between the words *serva*, that is, servant, and *domestica*, housekeeper. Servants are found in palaces and chateaux, while every rationally thinking member of the upper middle class had a housekeeper.

ondrej štefánik

PŠTROŠÍ MUŽ



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EXCERPT: TRANSLATED BY JANET LIVINGSTONE

Man on the Toilet

I'm so lucky! Even if I'm lucky in an unlucky situation. The gas station has been ambushed by gangsters or lunatics and I happen to be, thank God, in the bathroom with the door locked. Safe and sound. I just hope the crazy murderers won't need to take a piss. Unlikely. They'll definitely take off as soon as possible. Judging from the shooting, the terrifying screaming and the quiet that followed, the lunatics have killed everything that moves. A quick hit. Maybe it was just one whacko. Actually, I'm more worried that I've run out of toilet paper. I hear footsteps. Shit! This isn't good. This isn't good at all. Someone rattles the door handle hard. My heart just jumped into my mouth.

"Is there someone in there?" asks a man. Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God! I'm screwed. What should I do? How does the door open? Inward? If it opened outward, I could open it really fast and bash the guy in the head. I'll bite his ear off.

"Is there someone in there?!" he shouts and bangs on the door. I'm dead. I'm definitely dead. Shit!

"Could you please bring me some paper or some napkins? There's no more toilet paper in here," I say. I couldn't think of anything else to say. On the other side of the door there's a chilling, interminable silence. I hear footsteps again. I can't move. My body is paralyzed. At least I managed to take a dump before dying. I can't imagine them killing me with full intestines. That would be horrible. Footsteps again. Yuck. What an awful sound. I'm dead. Jesus, I'm seriously dead. It can't be true! I'm going to die on the toilet. No one dies on the toilet. Not that.

"I brought you some napkins, you can open the door and I'll hand them in to you," says the man calmly. He seems friendly. His voice doesn't sound...so smart.

"OK. But I'm still not done. It'll only be a second," I announce so that he doesn't sniff my fear. I didn't see or hear anything. I'm playing for time. I'm dead. I know it. I'm dead. Maybe he'll leave. My heart is going to explode in a minute. I have to think of something. But what? Maybe he'll leave. I have keys in my pocket. I'll open the door and stab him in the neck with one of them. What if he has accomplices out there? How many keys do I have? Do I have enough? Oh right, one is enough. I'm an idiot.

"Hurry up. I can't take this much longer," says a wise, masculine voice, urging me on. It's a murderous professor.

"I just want you to know that I'm on your side. After everything that's

happened here, I'm with you and I will happily take your side and I won't ask anything for it. Don't you need anyone for some dirty work, by chance?" I ask. I ask with a tough voice. Like I'm a pretty tough guy. But the lunatic doesn't seem tough, he seems intelligent. I should have asked him in a smart voice. How does a smart voice sound? Fuck, I don't even know how to imitate a smart voice. Lots of things occur to a person in danger. Totally useless bullshit. No one prepared me for this. Mobile phone! Of course, I have a mobile! I'll call the police.

"I don't need anyone. Just move it," the man says pushing me.

"Aren't any of the other stalls free?" I ask. I'm wondering whether I've already lost my mind with fear.

"I already took care of those. This is the only stall left," answers the man calmly. Shivers run through my body. I've fallen into the wolf's den. What did he take care of? And why did he bring me napkins when he wants to kill me? Maybe he doesn't want to kill me. Why doesn't he just kick down the door? Why is he waiting for me to open it? I'm dead.

"What do you mean you took care of it?" I ask him, frightened.

"That's not your business," he answers.

"And what if we agreed that I would stay here, and you would calmly leave and forget about everything?" I suggest with the naïve expectation of a miracle.

"Except that I have to go to the bathroom. Don't you get it?!" he says raising his voice.

"So go use another stall," I propose.

"I'm telling you, I already took care of it in the other stalls," he repeats, slightly peeved.

"What did you take care of? You have to shit in each stall?" I ask him. I hope I haven't made him angry.

"It's not your business," he answers. What could he have taken care of? I didn't hear anything in the bathroom, no sounds, screams or shots. I'm trembling all over, I'm passing out. I am so dead.

"I have a family!" I shout desperately. Not that that announcement has ever made a difference in the movies, but it's worth a try. I'm on the verge of tears. I don't have any ideas. I don't want to die.

"Why are you sitting there for so long? Because you have a family?" the lunatic asks cynically.

"I have small children. They need me," I say, begging for my life. Apparently I'm already crying. I don't even know.

"I don't think you're going to be too useful to your family if you spend

eternity on the toilet,” he advises me. He’s quiet for a moment. Maybe he left. I didn’t hear any footsteps. He hasn’t left. He rattles the door handle again.

“Come out already!” he says raising his voice.

“Please, before you do it to me, couldn’t you just bring me a Snickers bar?” I ask. I couldn’t think of anything else. I have a sugar craving. I don’t want to die without something sweet. I should think of Katherine. I know... but I’m thinking about Snickers. I’m ashamed of it. I want a Snickers bar.

“And what is it you think I’m going to do to you?” the man asks and starts to laugh. His voice has stopped sounding intelligent. He’s a lunatic! Now I’m sure. That’s a crazy man’s laughter. I text all my friends asking them to call the police right away. It’s life and death. A matter of seconds. My hands are shaking. I can’t write the text properly.

“So what do you think I’m going to do to you?” the lunatic repeats.

“You won’t do anything to me, right? Because I have a family. They need me. I don’t have any money on me. And I didn’t see anything or hear anything. Like I wasn’t here at all,” I say, convincing, insisting, begging, whining.

“How old are your children?” he asks me, like on a TV quiz show. He’s got me now. I don’t have any children. I’ll tell him they’re really little. Maybe that will work. Just to be sure, I’ll tell him that I have a son and a daughter and that my son is in a wheelchair.

“My son is five and my daughter six,” I say making it up. But what if this lunatic has lost his family and can’t stand people with families? Then I will have really fucked up.

“Tell me their dates of birth,” the lunatic challenges me. This shocks me.

“My son is in a wheelchair and needs constant care. I love him,” I say, instead of giving their dates of birth.

“When were they born?” the lunatic continues, undaunted. The wheelchair ploy didn’t work.

“I can’t recall under pressure like this,” I say avoiding him. Sweat is pouring off me. I’m losing it.

“Doesn’t all that sitting on the toilet hurt already?” he says and laughs again.

“Go away and leave me alone. I’m begging you!” I whimper, crestfallen.

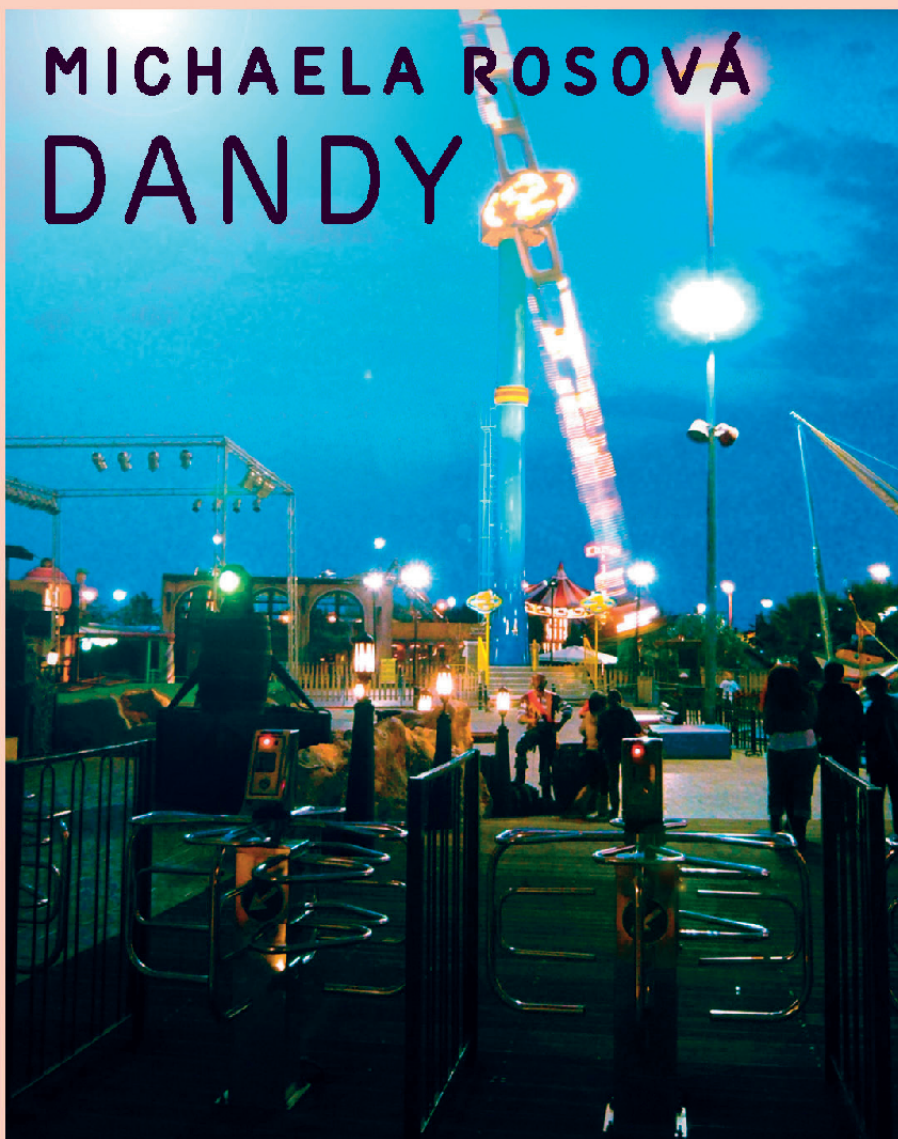
“I’m not going anywhere. I’m staying right here until you come out of there,” he answers and I believe him.

“And what if the police come soon?” I say threatening, trying to save myself.

“What for? Are they going to prohibit me from taking a shit?”

I think about how to get out of this situation. Keys in the neck?

MICHAELA ROŠOVÁ DANDY



EXCERPT: TRANSLATED BY JOHN MINAHANE

Ole was born in eighty six, he's twenty four. He's two years younger than me. His only sister, who's older, works in Holland as a hotel manager. He doesn't like her. Actually he hardly knows her.

Ole is from Berlin. He isn't German; Germany and Berlin, those are two different things; Ole is from Berlin. His pulse beats to the rhythm of the city and he will live there till the world expires.

There was a year when he went to secondary school but he didn't study, he flew off to Australia, on the trail of a young woman. In love.

First they'd been together in Berlin, enclosed in her room. They watched films, listened to music, read books. They played games and it was then that Ole got those ideas; they started to scratch, bite and batter each other. And it was never enough. One whole winter in that bed; outside the window it was snowing; her parents occasionally rapped on the door: you two be careful. Afterwards she was on the other side of the globe and Ole was over the ocean. When he finally landed and made it to the hotel, she was standing in front of the entrance and her face was pocked with ugly blisters. Her skin was inflamed by that fierce heat: it was disgusting. He turned about. He went away and for two years roamed the Australian deserts. He gave haircuts to chance acquaintances, bought a car and stuck a naked Barbie doll with black tape on the windscreen, danced, sang and wept. He sang and was completely happy.

I don't know exactly what happened after his return to Berlin, but certainly there were some drugs involved, some anger, and afterwards emptiness. That's why Ole can't bear it, why he yells and hops about, when I say I don't feel anything, that there's nothing at all in me. You're miles away from such a state, he yells, I abandoned myself for a whole year, something changed in my head. *Depersonalisation!* I as someone else, without a will! You can't imagine it!

His father took Ole off to a psychiatric unit. He never tells me in detail about that.

When we come back tipsy from Madonna at four in the morning and he forces me to the wall with his elbow pressed to my throat, I wonder if it will really be possible to stop at any moment. If he won't cripple me, if he won't kill me, because that strength in him all at once is so alien. There's no sense asking him. So far, three times quite out of the blue, he has stopped by himself; suddenly he was looking at me with concern, asking if that wasn't too much. Except that even I don't know.

We can bear more than we suppose. No limits.



Veronika Šikulová

*Miesta
v sieti*

EXCERPT: TRANSLATED BY JULIA AND PETER SHERWOOD

Up to now

(Verona)

What a Coca Cola evening it is zero nothing zilch as our maths teacher in Modra used to say but in March 68 a female registrar and a priest entered me into the birth register at Čeklís as one of God knows how many Veronas a train might have arrived just then with my Dad coming back from Verona he was no Romeo just Vinco from Dubová who'd received a PEN-club award so that's when I was born they added me to all the others and expected me to come up with answers I'm forty-three now but I'm still all curled up like I was inside my mum still putting questions instead of coming up with answers putting myself before others it's me behind the silence of an old barn or a ramshackle shed I'm constantly in awe of life shamelessly snatching slices of it offering some to my children too although I don't understand them neither do I understand my husband usually I'm alone chirping away like an abandoned bird's nest it used to be a cheerful bird's nest it still is but without me it's somewhere at the back it's been here ever since I was born sometimes I encounter myself in other people this is a very relevant topic a lonely wasp in a community of people I mostly encounter myself in men mainly because I understand them better but they don't understand me although I tower over them like teachers standing on steps tower over their students I stand there showing off my assets those in front as well as those at the back I show off my front and rear but to no avail I don't seem to be able to lure anyone into my orbit except for my one and only the one I don't understand the one who quietly shares a household with me we've both learned to shout at each other and to curse one another so much we no longer listen to one another what if there's no God we think to ourselves as if we regretted this fact as if everyone regretted this fact of course there's no tangible proof and history often suggests the opposite for there's never been a shortage of suffering either in my family or in the history of mankind maybe only a single instance to do with ordinary love it's all about getting married about not throwing stones if you live in a glass house about being able to live in matrimony with the same man after all you can't remain true to yourself and give yourself away at the same time but what if you meet someone who happens to wear trousers and you suddenly feel my goodness this is the right one are you supposed to inform the right one at home that he's the wrong one explain that I just haven't been blessed with the ability to tell the difference because in my family everyone has always sided with men strangely enough everyone always favoured them as if they'd always been away fighting wars...



MILO URBAN

ŽIVÝ BIČ - I

EXCERPT: TRANSLATED BY ANDREW CINCURA

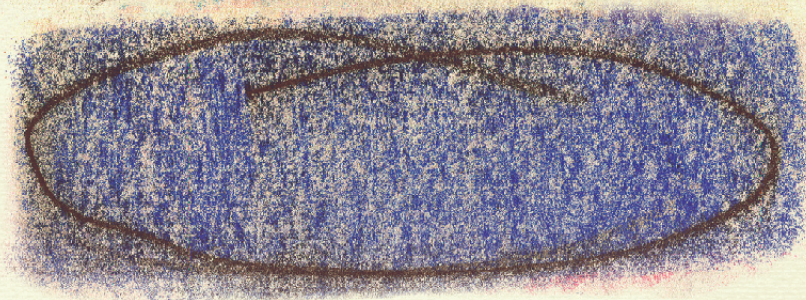
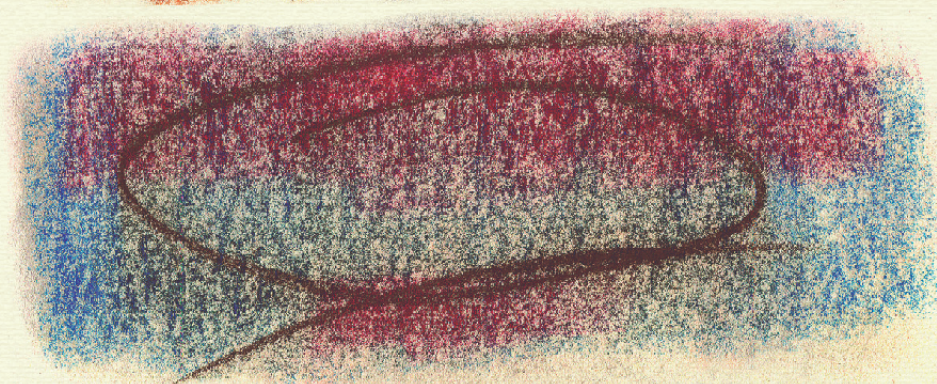
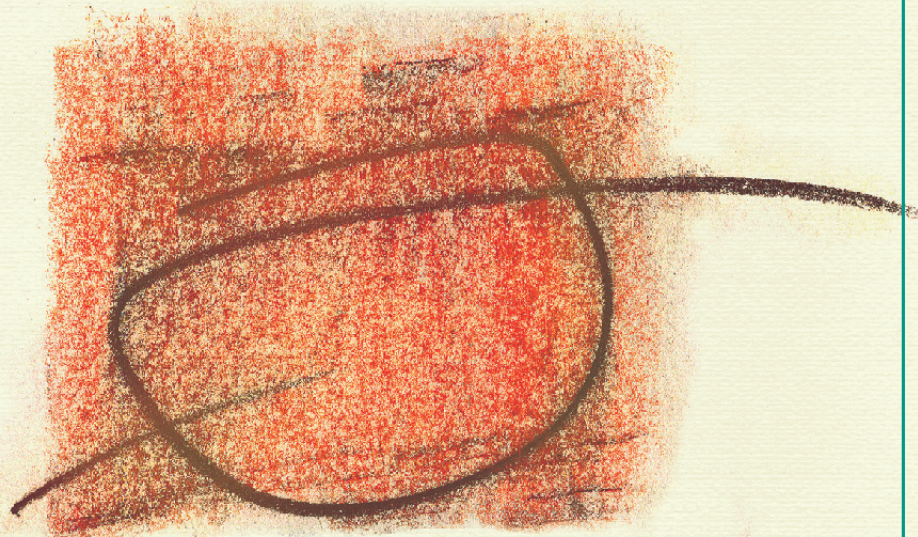
In the beginning, the inhabitants of Rastoky did not understand what really happened. They knew the word and they used it in their talks about the past; however, at that time there was nothing dreadful about it. The word flowed freely from their lips and evoked notions of mist and of the turns inherent in folk tales. The fields had not been torn up. The cities were not burning. And the blood, some sort of strange and beautiful blood, gushed painlessly from wounds. Not even death itself seemed awesome. Komar, a veteran of the Austro-Hungarian campaign in Bosnia, smiled whenever he spoke of a comrade who had been hit by a bullet direct in his heart. Komar smiled as if he were narrating a story from the *Arabian Nights*. People liked his stories and he told them again and again whenever there was an occasion for them, now and then adding something to his narration, now and then abridging it, now and then changing its parts. Komar's stories constituted almost all the Rastokian knowledge of war.

Thus the Rastokians did not know anything specific about war, even when the war was in full swing. Rastoky was situated in the northernmost part of Slovakia—as people say—“behind God's back”. The news about the war reaching the village seemed to be strained, amorphous, and bland. The villagers heard about the number of Russians drowned in the Masurian Marshes or about the skirmishes between the Serbian national guard and the Austro-Hungarian army or about the soldiers dying of thirst on the distant Plain of Doberda. But all this was far, far away. The inhabitants of Rastoky saw no cannons or machine guns. They confused grenades with shrapnel. The heavy cannons, whose fire cracked windows for a two-mile radius, seemed to the Rastokians to be some kind of supernatural monsters possessed of both free will and intelligence. The Rastokians believed that such cannons killed merely wicked men and demolished sodomite cities. Good men kept winning with the help of these cannons. And whenever it happened that one of the good fell, his death was just a tragic error, a stupid accident, and he—an instant hero—went directly to heaven.

Thus the villagers did not understand, and would not understand, the true meaning of war had war not stricken them with its cruel hand and hit them directly in the heart. The war did not hold back. It found the village Rastoky and pulled it into the whirlpool of worldwide conflict despite the village's location “behind God's back.”

PAVEL
Vilikovský

LETMÝ SNEH



EXCERPT: TRANSLATED BY HEATHER TREBATICKÁ

There are a thousand definitions of love. For the most part it is understood to be a sudden hormonal storm, a period of intensive fascination that according to the experts—endocrinologists and sexologists—lasts about three-quarters of a year, or with hormonally talented individuals sometimes even a year. It would be more precise to speak of a state of being in love, but people overwhelmed by emotion are not particularly concerned with precision.

In my opinion this interpretation is too narrow, too closely tied to the body and the ductless glands. I once had the thousand and first, universal definition: Love is when someone seems unique to us. Love like that need not be exclusively erotic, the body does not have to be the lead singer, but I have discovered that it too has limited durability—how long can a person seem unique when we are with them every day? I discovered that, like the state of being in love, this is only a phase; like every top coat of paint, uniqueness wears off in time. Štefan, who does not believe in human uniqueness, even claims that this is self-deception or subconscious calculation: if someone is unique for us, we tell ourselves that it means we too can be unique for someone else. And therefore in fact unique overall, full stop. According to Štefan, this general faith in one's own uniqueness is proof that people are not unique at all.

I know I'm not unique, I told him. Couldn't just that be proof of my uniqueness? But Štefan is a scientist: he can't understand a joke. Anyway, I was only pulling his leg—I think I am about as unique as everyone else.

Nowadays I have a more modest, less universal definition of love. I don't want to force it on anyone, but I have no doubts about its validity: Love is when someone is leaving and you feel you want to tell them something. You feel it is something important and urgent, even though it might not appear to be, but you can't for the life of you remember what it was, or you are pressed for time and you cannot quickly choose from the enormous number of things that have never been said. But until the very last minute you do not give up hope and so you accompany the person who is leaving all the way to the train; you do not mind standing in a queue at the ticket office and spending sixty hellers for a platform ticket.

And that was the simple test, that was the touchstone for love that is missing nowadays. You would say goodbye to ordinary acquaintances or friends in the station concourse, you would shake hands, or if it were a woman, you would kiss her on the cheek, and that would be that. You would turn on your heel and you wouldn't even watch as he or she carried their suitcase down the stairs. It wouldn't even occur to you to go onto the platform, and they would not expect it of you anyway. With such people you share a certain affinity, mutual goodwill, but neither of you would call it love.

Svetlana Žuchová

Obrazy

zo

života

M.

MARENČIN PT

EXCERPT: TRANSLATED BY HEATHER TREBATICKÁ

Night work

In the hospital people don't sleep or keep awake according to the sun. Just as they don't sleep at night in the hospital, they are allowed to sleep during the day. No one is surprised if I say I'm going to lie down for a while. We all lie down for a while. I close the door and turn off the light. It's not yet four o'clock, but the sky is overclouded and so it is almost dark. I cover the sofa with a white blanket that only I use. Anyone lies on the sofa who needs to rest for a while, or who sleeps here in the night. We don't mind and we sleep under the same duvet, which is now rolled up in the storage space under the sofa. I sleep without a pillow, but I sometimes put the pillow behind my back when I am reading on the sofa and leaning up against the wall. Then I place the pillow behind my back and occasionally catch a whiff of other people. When on occasion I lie down on this sofa in the evening under the hospital duvet, I don't mind the traces left by other colleagues. I'm always terribly tired and I would lie down anywhere. Like when during long coach journeys on international routes some of the passengers stretch out in the aisle between the seats. Or at an airport, when people exhausted from jet lag and the dry air on board the planes lie down on the floors of the departure halls. The need to sleep is sometimes so urgent that people disregard hygienic habits and lie down wherever there happens to be room.

Nevertheless, with time I did learn several rules. Unlike an intercontinental flight, the night shift is not an exceptional situation. When there were only a few of us on the ward, we were on duty once every three days. During my first shifts I behaved like a dog, lying down anywhere. Apparently before a dog settles down it first turns around several times. This is said to be a relic of past times in the steppe, when it had to prepare a place in the tall grass before lying down. During my first shifts I spread a sleeping bag out on the floor in the room and stretched out on it covered by a blanket. Sometimes I lay down still fully dressed so as not to lose time if the telephone should ring in the night. I didn't put my bed away in the morning, so I could use it during the day. I didn't take a shower; I just cleaned my teeth and washed my face in the basin in the ladies toilets. I'm in the habit of washing my hair often and the day after night duty I would feel dirty. My unwashed hair was unmanageable. The cleaner who came to wash the floor for us every morning would roll up my sleeping bag together with the blanket and leave it in the corner of the room and dust and hairs from the ground could be seen on the black synthetic material.