

Centre  
for Information  
on Literature  
Bratislava



# Books from Slova- kia 2017

# Juraj Bindzár

## *Quietly and In Brief*

*This gripping story, about the remarkable life of the chess genius Richard Réti and his love for a beautiful Moscow poet and actress twenty years his junior, uniquely captures the genius loci of his native Pezinok and the flair of many of the world's great cities, where grandmaster Réti played his chess matches.*

This is an arresting novel, written in a very attractive form with a distinctive style, without mannerism and with a convincing ring of authenticity. It is not a study of the original genius of Richard Réti and the innovations he brought to chess, nor is it an analysis of his master games. Nothing of that kind. The author tells the painful story of the first Czechoslovak international grandmaster and his unfulfilled life's dream, and his bizarre marriage, lasting less than three years, to the beautiful Moscow poet and actress Rogneda Sergejevna Gorodecka. Richard (Richie) Réti was born in 1889 to a Jewish family. His father Samuel had a well-established medical practice: he treated venereal diseases and had no lack of clients, principally from Pressburg and Vienna, where there were always "many lusty men and roaming husbands and a great many more light-footed mademoiselles and windfall wives". Even as a child Richie Réti was an excellent chess-player, defeating the cream of Pezinok. After moving to Vienna he used to play chess in the Café Central with the local chess elite. On the

outbreak of World War 1 Richie departed to the front at Halič, where General Fritz von Hohensteiner, a passionate chess-player, claimed him as his orderly. In Halič he made acquaintance with Wittgenstein, later to be the renowned philosopher. After the war Réti became a Czechoslovak grandmaster. In 1924 he defeated "the unbeatable" chess master Capablanca in New York; he travelled and won matches all over the world. He met Milan Rastislav Štefánik; in Vienna he made acquaintance with Hitler; fleetingly Lenin appeared there with Krupskaya, Stalin with Yagoda and Dzerzhinsky; Réti three times defeated Béla Kun. In Moscow he enjoyed the protection of a chess enthusiast, the all-powerful general procurator Nikolaj Krylenko, the arch-murderer who was later executed by Stalin. There he met the young Rogneda, daughter of the poet Sergej Gorodecky, whom he married when she was 16 years old. They left Russia and lived a bohemian life, but their happiness did not last long... the chess genius died in Prague of scarlet fever at the age of 40. Splendid reading!

*“When I write a novel there is hardship and drudgery, and also the greatest solitary joy that I’ve ever experienced. THE NOVEL’s TIME, that is a time which is at least dual, or in other words there is writing time, the time of the characters in action, the inner time of the story... But here there is also the time of the novel as reading; that is more or less restricted and bounded by the intensity of the artistic experience, dictated by the limits of perception...”*



PHOTO (C) JANA LIŠÁNIKOVÁ

### Juraj Bindzár (1943)

The range of his creative activities (prose, poetry, drama, screenplay, radio work etc.) makes Bindzár one of the most universal authors currently writing. He graduated in aesthetics and teatrology at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University, Prague, and in stage direction at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. After his studies he worked in theatres in Nitra and Banská Bystrica, and also in Nová scéna in Bratislava and Czech Television in Bratislava. He was also briefly a private entrepreneur after 1989, founding the Sezam film-video firm. As a playwright he wrote several plays to motifs by other writers, addressed principally to audiences of children, including *Vianočné divadlo H. Ch. Andersena*, *Haydnova hlava*, *Nanebovstúpenie grófy Báthory*, *Robinson*, *Bájky* etc. (H. C. Andersen’s Christmas Theatre, Haydn’s Head, The Assumption into Heaven of Countess Báthory, Robinson, Fairytales etc.) Based on a prose work by A. Platonov, he wrote the play *Balada o hrdinskej krave* (Ballad of the Heroic Cow, ). His literary activity in poetry and prose reached its full development only when older. The

poetry collection *Krajina nespavosti* (Land of Insomnia, 2000), where the poems are those of a mature intellectual, may be regarded as his debut. A further collection was the bilingual work *Dvojhľavé srdce – Dvojhľavé srdce* (Double-headed Heart, 2012), a bibliophile edition. His first prose work was a book containing two crime stories, played out in England and the USA, *Zabi ma nežne alebo Šibenica pre malého muža* (Kill Me Tenderly or Gallows for a Small Man, 2002); subsequently he produced a book of five crime stories from the contemporary period, *Prázdny hrob* (The Empty Grave, 2003). His novel *Tanec s mŕtvou slúžkou* (Dance with a Dead Servant Girl, 2004) on the tragic fate of a small Jewish community in Austria-Hungary, was a notable success with readers. After many years’ silence he published two loosely sequential novels, *Bez dúhy (plebejský Román)* [With No Rainbow (A Plebeian Novel), 2011] and *Hekuba, román herečky* (Hecuba, A Novel of Acting, 2012). His book *Bez dúhy* was nominated for the final of the Anasoft litera Prize, as also was his latest novel *Mlčky a krátko* (Quietly and In Brief, 2016).

### Juraj Bindzár *Mlčky a krátko*

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Juraj Bindzár

# Mlčky a krátko

Balada  
o živote a smrti  
šachového génia  
Richarda  
Rétiho

ORMAN

## TODAY TOO

Riči is in the Café Central, sitting at a chessboard in the third booth next to the windows and for some time he has been watching a fellow who is walking slowly between the tables and occasionally making for a booth. He is a young man with a moustache, wearing a long dirty coat reaching the ground and mercifully covering his heavy boots, which are shedding mud here and there – something head waiter Apa Willi is loath to see, but what can be done, a guest is a guest, and so in a muffled voice he calls out to the potboy and nods pointedly at what the ill-bred visitor has left on the polished parquet floor, whereupon the boy follows his trail armed with a brush and dust pan.

This is the same fellow Riči saw a little earlier from the café window; he was standing in the doorway of the butcher's – Feine Wurst und Fisch Ehrlich und Sohn – with another similarly odd character, who in his short coat looked like a villager. They were eating something very tasty, wolfing it straight from the paper, clearly relishing who knows what kind of titbit.

The one with the moustache then wiped his fingers on his sleeve, straightened his hat and hurried across the road to the entrance of the Café Central.

Riči has time to observe the surroundings, because his friend Breyer, who is playing with the black pieces, is about to lose his knight and has been pondering for a long time, fretting.

The young man is carrying his hat in one hand and with the other he is holding a black cardboard folder to his chest; he is walking slowly, alert, and whenever he sees a likely customer in one of the booths he approaches them with an apologetic grimace on his face, while opening the folder and offering his drawings and several water colours depicting picturesque nooks in Vienna, colourful bouquets and some genre scenes. He spreads out the pictures on cheap paper wherever he can, displaying them shyly and saying the price – drawings fifty Kreuzer, water colours two krone, and when they turn him down he sighs and almost as if relieved that it is all over, he gathers up his artistic creations, raises his hat and moves on.

In the rear, let's say men's section, in the booths with windows facing Herrengasse, there are mainly chess players; the young man knows with absolute certainty that he won't sell anything there, but even so he somehow continues automatically, treading more quietly and bowing politely while passing those silent madmen over whose heads there hangs a cloud of cigar and cigarette smoke.

# Zuza Cigánová

## *Evol*

*Suddenly love is at  
sixes and sevens.  
Can't live with it, can't  
live without it.*

The story of an innocent flirtation, a platonic love or an ordinary romantic vagary, which almost capsizes a mature couple's marriage. They don't want to hurt anyone, but by now they themselves are hurting. Julo, the older proprietor of an architectural studio, every morning helps his younger employee Liliana to take off her coat. This seemingly banal action, however, is enough to disturb the intimate trust of Julo and Hela's long-established marriage. The events that occur in the book cannot be explicitly named or captured in words: there is gaze, touch, fragrance, feeling, desire, indefinite misery, that all remains beneath the surface. In the end there isn't even a reality, only a kind of spectre. And yet it has implications that are almost fatal: it leads to sorrow and loneliness for two people who were once extremely close. Love is shown here as a force that creates but also destroys lives and worlds, even when it is only a fleeting spectre. In *Evol* Zuza Cigánová boldly tests how much she can do with language, how it may be played with, and how what is heard and lived through may be captured most faithfully. More than from literary handbooks, she draws resources from her profession as an actress, from all that she has heard and observed.

*“Characters that are acted have a lot of the author in them, as well as those that are written. Played characters more so, they have a common body. Written ones less: after all, no one can suppose that Shakespeare was Lady Macbeth. For him the sacramental feminine could only be seen somewhere out there, among the neighbours. But he too sometimes felt greed and malice blow through him like a draught. And thus, with talent combining, the prototype of that kind of woman emerged for all time.”*



PHOTO (C) AUTHOR'S ARCHIVE

### **Zuza Cigánová (1947)**

Actress and writer. She performed in her first film as a 13-year-old. Since 1970 she has worked on stage sets at the Slovak National Theatre. She made her literary debut with the travel book *Kúsok cesty okolo sveta* (Bit of a Journey Round the World, 1991). *Šampanské, káva, pivo* (Champagne, Coffee, Beer, 2007) won her a place among the finalists of Anasoft litera, the most prestigious Slovak literary prize; also among the ten books short-listed for that prize were her later works *Špaky v trní* (Cigarette Ends in Thorns, 2012) and *Aksál* (Evol, 2016). In 2015 a stage adaptation of her book *Dopadne to dobre, pes bude rád* (Things Will Be Fine, the Dog Will Be Glad, 1995) had its premiere in the Slovak National Theatre. Zuzana Cigánová's writing is noted for playful and spontaneous narration with unobtrusive irony, concentrating on capturing what is happening through small details and scraps of conversations, but also using stream of consciousness and distinctive work with language. The main characters in her prose works experience the world around them sensually and corporeally; they are distinguished by their directness, desire for sincere closeness, feeling and tenderness.

### **Zuza Cigánová *Aksál***

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AKSĀL

CIGĀNOVĀ

ZUZA





**He had been looking forward to those few minutes for days....**And it happened in the most natural of ways....Arriving before the others in good time.....Having with him all his clever rhymes...To arrive fifteen minutes early and wait....How sad it would be if he'd been late!.....To help her out of her coat.....Oh such an elegant coat! ...Wherever, whenever just to be at hand...Booted and suited, looking grand...Because just a few days ago...just a few days in the past....something – call it impulse, fate, destiny...something stopped him, shook him, shocked him and she just whispered ‘thank you’... And one of his hands was on her throat, the other, her coat unbuttoned, almost on her chest....At that moment he stopped with all his silly quips, all his clumsy rhymes....something in his very core was weighing him down, in his heart, his stomach?...and it was just...that moment...just for a moment they remained standing and the heat surged through their throats...And each hand felt the same. Both pulsating. Like the sun...And they were breathing... Breathing? When they finally had to...he first, from the depths of his being... he made amends, corrected his mistake, put one hand on her shoulder while the second caressed her sleeve...Until it reached the button...And again they stood, their breath merging...and she unfurled like a sweet melody...And he finally started to take off her coat though it was as if he was undressing her... Every hint of contact now mattered, every millisecond of it...Her hair cascaded over his wrist and he was startled and shook it off...But immediately touched it with his fingers, feeling how cool and smooth it was as it slipped away from him...And as each sleeve was removed, she felt more vulnerable....and only turned when her coat lay helplessly in his hands...and he sighed with relief, his eyes half-closed...and she saw it and smiled....And they parted....Left each other's parcels of warmth...leaving behind them their breath, their careful intakes of breath and delicate exhalations.... Only she couldn't get her balance back straightaway so he offered her his...If it wasn't so natural, it would have been touching. If it wasn't now, it would have been like it used to be. She held onto him firmly, warmly for a second like a little girl...And then that velvet flower slipped from his hand. He closed his fist so that it would stay there – and for a moment the impression of its firmness remained....And they went on standing in each other's breath...for no particular reason...And it didn't feel stupid or embarrassing, nor did they want to – or have to – say anything.... They just had the feeling that they'd experienced something, as if something had happened.....I suppose she felt it in her breasts and he deep down in his groin...But neither noticed anything they were so preoccupied with the other... And he knew she would let him hang her coat up, that he had to hang it up. So he had her soft, scented coat in his hands for a moment longer...such a joy...

# Ivana Gibová

## *Barbora, Goad & Catharsis*

*A romantic-eclectic-punk story about how to be yourself when there's not just you living in your body, there's also someone else.*

Barbora is three years old and she's playing with cubes under the kitchen table. In that same kitchen, just a few metres from the child, Barbora's mother stabs her husband, Barbora's father, to death. Next the mother stabs herself to death. It is then that Sylvia makes her appearance in Barbora. Barbora and Sylvia govern one and the same body. Sometimes Barbora has the ascendancy, at other times Sylvia. Barbora struggles with feelings of guilt and the need to live healthily, not drinking or smoking. Sylvia swaps one lover for the next. Barbora believes in truth and love, Sylvia despises love and doesn't understand truth. Sylvia casts men out to sea, Barbora weeps when they go. Sylvia characterises herself as a worldly opportunist and adds in so many words that she enjoys being a moral collaborator. Barbora has had it drummed into her head that her perception of the world is wrong, which is one more reason why she is confused. Sylvia is a destructive force. Barbora is dissatisfied with her life. Sylvia is contemptuous of Barbora. Both of them love the same man: they love Milan, though each in a somewhat different way. Milan Borgula is married, Sylvia has two other lovers and Barbora... Barbora needs Milan to know the truth, and also to tell the truth to his wife. So that all may know the truth. When Barbora has had enough of Sylvia's escapades, she will begin to talk to Goad.

*“I think of this book of mine as punk writing, because I completely stopped paying any heed to what I’d had drummed into my head about literature from the theoretical standpoint – I wanted to send all that to blazes and write my own way. In future I’m going to write a different way again, but I think, even so, there are some points of contact between all three books.”*



PHOTO (C) JURAJ STAROVECKY

**Ivana Gibová (1985)**

Studied Slovak language and literature. She is a laureate of several literary competitions and a holder of the Debut 2011 award. 2013 saw the publication of her short story collection *Usadenina* (The Sediment). Next she published an ego-document, the novella *Bordeline* (2014), where she describes the story of a young woman with a borderline personality disorder. Based on this, a stage production of the same name was presented in the one-and-only Stoka Theatre. The novella *Barbora, Boch & Katarzia* (Barbora, Goad & Catharsis, 2016) is this writer’s most recent book and one of the ten finalists of Anasoft litera prize 2017.

**Ivana Gibová**  
***Barbora, Boch & Katarzia***

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ivana gibová



barbora, boch



MARENČIN MEDIA

The next day Sylvia waits for Milan in a hotel room because they cannot meet at her place as Mrs Borguľová would certainly be patrolling the area below her block of flats because yesterday she confronted her husband and although he denied everything, she was not sure whether to believe him. Milan then did it to her out of a sense of duty and claimed that he had never cheated on her and that he loved her. The next day Milan leaves work for lunch and goes to have sex with Sylvia. He enters the hotel room, which Sylvia has rearranged. She has moved the creaking bed to beneath the window and has put the mattress on the floor. She has put on some suspenders and a pair of genuine tarty seven-hundred-euro Fiorangelo shoes which Milan bought for her only for these purposes: only so that he can pull a top-of-the-range whore. Sylvia returns to power and for six hours Barbora ceases to exist. Milan leans over her, licks her nipples and pulls the leather belt from his trousers. He then stands her up and ties her hands behind her back with the belt, leans her against the door and aggressively thrusts his cock into her; her body is all Sylvia's and Milan rams hard into her, grabs her hair and calls her Barbora, the hotel whore. Soon after, his ejaculate is glistening on her seven-hundred-euro shoes. Milan then throws Sylvia onto the bed and asks her things, whereas it should be her asking him things: she should be speaking to him. Barbora is regaining consciousness and suddenly trampling all over Sylvia, who no longer thinks about their bellies and eating bread; Sylvia thinks of nothing, in fact, and stops existing because she is starting to be Barbora. And Barbora says how horrible everything is, how it's all just lies and pretence, and she talks and talks about her second and third lover, speaks only the truth and is unable to stop herself. "So you've had two other affairs during our relationship!? I think I'm going to throw up," says Milan to Barbora, who never once has felt like throwing up even though Mrs Borguľová has been waiting the whole time for Milan Borguľa to come home to her. And she asks him why he hasn't told his wife the truth. "Are you nuts?" Barbora says everything about herself and Sylvia, about sex with other men, about anal sex only with Milan. "You've got no morals!" he yells, not so much objecting to the fact that she's telling him everything, warts and all, as to her having two other lovers. He can't handle it, gets angry and starts shouting but Barbora doesn't notice and instead wonders whether Sylvia is an autonomous being and needs her own actual body, whether she and Barbora are just two parts of one consciousness or are two separate consciousnesses joined together in one body through one of Goad's malicious sleights-of-hand. And she wonders whether there is any connection between Goad and morality, given Goad could be anyone.



# Katarína Holetzová

## *Death of the Accursed*

*Who will solve the ritual murders in the mountains?*

For centuries the inhabitants of the mountain village of Terovca have lived by their own rules. During traditional celebrations of the summer solstice the sister of a local businessman is burned alive. There are more and more dead bodies as the scorching summer passes, and the clues lead towards a New Age pagan society which has links to highly-placed politicians. René Juhász, a young policeman who has taken up law enforcement after a series of failures, finds himself on the case. During his first investigation the 30-year-old redhead is not only up against a murderer but must also confront the hatred of colleagues and his own fear.

*“From childhood I’ve had lots of stories in my head that would surface quickly and equally quickly vanish, to lie uncompleted in drawers. All I wanted was to write: for a very long time that’s been clear to me.”*



**Katarína Holetzová (1988)**

wrote for various Czech and Slovak media, concentrating on literary and music journalism. She worked for the dailies Pravda and SME and the magazines Report and Rock&Pop, among others. For a while she was a copywriter and she spent one lovely phase of her life on the road with rock bands, whom she was managing. Sometimes she cannot decide whether she’d rather listen to music, read books or watch films. She likes Led Zeppelin, David Lynch, Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, Agatha Christie, System of a Down, The Three Investigators, Miley Cyrus, hippie blues-rock, Dežo Ursiny, Tom Hardy and Odviate vetrom. For years she has lived happily in Bratislava with her nice husband and nasty dog. In her free time (which she has lots of during the day, because she likes to work at night) she lectures at a university. Apart from that, she hates doing housework and enjoys sitting in smoke-filled cafes.

**Translated titles:**

CZECH:

***Smrt prokletých***

**(Death of the Accursed)**

Ablatros media, XYZ, Praha, 2017

**Katarína Holetzová**  
***Smrť prekliatych***

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KATARÍNA HOLETZOVÁ

# SMRŤ PREKLIATYCH

MRAZIVÉ  
SLOVENSKÉ  
KRIMI

KTO ODHALÍ RITUÁLNE VRAŽDY V HORÁCH?

MARENČIN PT

A woman's muffled giggle dying away in the dark usually means only one thing. Adultery. Darina Krasňanová had been thoroughly enjoying indulging in this for several years now; in fact, whenever she got the chance. However, she had never felt so in love as she did just now. Three glasses of French red wine may have helped, or maybe the irresistible charm and charisma she attributed to her lover.

Igor was exactly the type of man that married forty-year-old women succumbed to. As if nature had endowed him with everything "just right" for this purpose. He was just the right number of years younger than her to boost her self-esteem, yet at the same time not to remind her that she was getting older. He was just right when it came to attractiveness; that is, no smug good-looker who took your breath away, but, unlike her husband, he took care of his appearance by frequenting the fitness centre and stores selling good quality sportswear. And last but not least, he had just the right amount of daring. Her affair with him was an adventure; she never knew what he would come up with the next time they met. Since the early morning she had been relishing the sweet and sour taste of forbidden fruit, which she found exceptionally attractive.

They didn't meet in hotels; Igor sought out far less traditional places for this purpose. He claimed that their relationship was something very special and he didn't want to spoil it with rushed sex in an impersonal room from which they would hurry before breakfast. Deserted chalets and huts, or blankets spread out well away from the village. In the last three months they had done it almost everywhere. Together they had visited places that no one else could have persuaded her to go to. She felt like a teenager who didn't care about luxury and comfort, but only about the man she was madly in love with.

"Where are we going?" she asked, not ceasing to giggle naughtily. They had been winding their way through valleys and she had almost completely lost her bearings.

The man at her side gave her a lustful wink and swung the steering wheel. He parked the black car on a mown meadow not far from a narrow path, the full moon lighting their way.

"We're almost there," he whispered in her ear and just the light touch of his skin sent pleasant shivers down Darina's spine.

Her pleasure did not last long. As soon as she realized where they were, she scowled discontentedly. She knew the place they were making for only too well. Her husband had talked about it for days on end. She pouted like a little child.

# Michal Hvorecký

## *Troll*

*Once upon a time history  
was written by the winner.  
Now history is written by  
the would-be winner.*

Welcome to a spellbinding, diverting and murky world, where something fundamental has changed. A guru of propaganda offers the hero a life prospect. The young man accepts the tempting offer and becomes a paid internet troll. But soon he discovers that in the war of stories there are no victors. He slaves away in a headline factory and makes new maps of the world. Though he had dreamed of making money quickly, now he faces the threat of losing love, face, and even his own name. A short novel about the long road to a hallucinatory world behind the looking glass. Michal Hvorecký has himself experienced what it is to be a trolls' target, and this same experience motivated him to write *Troll*.



*“I discovered what it is to be an object of memes and invented quotes, attributed to me, for example, by neo-Nazis and various fundamentalists. These fabrications spread through the internet entirely without my knowledge and I was not able to stop it. Then I understood that the world of conspiracies and propaganda is in large measure a world of fiction and invention. It’s a world that is actually very literary.”*



### Michal Hvorecký (1976)

prose writer and publicist. He studied aesthetics at the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra. He spent several years on research stays in the United States (Iowa City University) and in Europe (Belgium, Germany, Austria, Hungary). His debut collection of short stories *Silný pocit čistoty* (A Powerful Feeling of Chastity) appeared in 1998. In 2001 his next short story collection *Lovci & zberači* (Hunters & Gatherers) was published. Hvorecký has also written novels: *Plyš* (Plush, 2005), *Eskorta* (Escort, 2007) and *Dunaj v Amerike* (Danube in America, 2010). *Naum* (2012) is a further collection of short stories, eleven in all, focused on contemporary life in Bratislava and central Europe more generally. *Spamäti* (By Heart, 2013) is an authentic portrait of the author from his childhood in Bratislava, via the story of his extended family, down to the birth of his son. He wanders around Slovakia and the world, from Michalovce through Palermo to Kabul. Works of his are regularly translated into German, Italian, Polish and Czech. A dramatic adaptation of his novel *Plush* was performed at the *Aréna* theatre in Bratislava, the *Na zábradlí* theatre in Prague and the *Schauspielhaus* theatre in Hannover. He also attracts a general audience with his social and civic engagement.

### Translated titles:

#### BULGARIAN:

***Dunav v Amerika***  
(Danube in America)  
Nov Zlatorog, Sofia, 2013

#### CZECH:

***Silný pocit čistoty***  
(A Powerful Feeling of Chastity)  
Kniha Zlín, Zlín 2005

***Smrt na Dunaji***  
(Danube in America)  
Kniha Zlín, Zlín 2013

#### GERMAN:

***City: Der unwahrscheinlichste aller Orte***  
(Plush)  
Tropen Verlag, Berlin 2006

***Eskorta***  
(Escort)  
Tropen Verlag, Berlin 2009

***Tod auf der Donau***  
(Danube in America)  
Klett – Cotta, Stuttgart 2012

#### POLISH:

***W misji idealnej czystości***  
(A Powerful Feeling of Chastity)  
KWARTALNIK FA-art, Katowice, 2002

### Michal Hvorecký *Troll*

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# MICHAL HVORECKÝ TROL



MARENČIN PT

By now we had found our bearings at headquarters. We were working in a bizarre freak show.

Trolls. Cheap and effective labor. I didn't trust anyone except Johana. There were the bankrupt rockers, vindictive revanchists, cyber hackers, Internet jihadists, veterans of the Hybrid war, crazy adventure-seekers, and other suspicious types. They thought trolling was an exciting trek into the unknown, an adrenaline rush for which they didn't have to go whitewater rafting or rock climbing; they just had to sit at their computers.

I was hoping I hadn't turned into one of them, but I was afraid that hate had already seeped into my heart. I clenched my fists so as not to jump up and start yelling what I really thought about headquarters. Johana kept reminding me that it wasn't the right time yet.

For now there was nothing we could do about the awful shenanigans; we had to try to forget them, otherwise we'd go insane. I had the feeling that on top of our bond of friendship we now also shared a bond of fear and shame.

One extreme whackjob, whom Johana and I called the Philosopher, went so far as to refuse a salary. He trolled on principle and didn't expect remuneration. He claimed to have a degree in philosophy, but we couldn't find any evidence of it. He used titles before and after his name that didn't exist in the academic world. He made himself out to be an eternal rebel. His days started with a beer, a *borovička*, and a joint, and his results were consistent with this combination. What he produced was a mixture of bunk, base comments, and conspiratorial pub talk. Once in a while he picked up a book – some esoteric trash or the Protocols of the Elders of Zion – and consequently, people at headquarters treated him with an absurd reverence, as if he were an intellectual. The one-eyed man in the land of the blind was basking in the aura of a sage.

His bald head was as shiny as an apple. There was a shallow cut across his cheek. His eyes projected a healthy, active vulgarity. When he was in a bad mood, he couldn't stand being contradicted and used any excuse to fly into a rage. He would sweat and his eyes would become bloodshot. Looking pissed off was his permanent state of being. He constantly took selfies. Then he posted them online with motivational phrases of his own invention. He used Word to typeset this mind-blowing rubbish.

Supposedly he had really studied Marxism back in the day. He got kicked out of the university in his second semester because he got drunk and beat up two of his female classmates, causing them serious injury. After the fall of the Leader's regime he joined the radical wing of the Neo-Nazis. Two years ago he had established the National Homeland Defense.

# Pavel Vilikovský

## *The Beautiful Engine Driver, The Cruel Duchess*

*In his latest prose work Pavel Vilikovský lets us into the secrets of the love affair of a young employee of an advertising agency named Ivan, until suddenly we learn to our surprise that he's a character in a novel by a nameless Slovak writer.*

Ivan slips out of his creator's hands and against the latter's will begins to lead an independent life. Vilikovský presents the writer as an ordinary citizen who is moving in the world of ordinary concerns, but also lives in an imagined world and finds it ever more difficult to tell the two worlds apart. In both of them he must come to terms with intrusive doubts and bitter knowledge. Pavel Vilikovský shows us behind the scenes of the creative process and poses questions to himself and the reader on the various registers and forms of reality, which we in the rush of present-day life, to our own loss, are forgetting to ask.

*“That’s how it is with writing: I write through myself, but not about myself. I’m just that sensitive emulsion on the film, upon which light inscribes an external image.”*



PHOTO (C) LUCIA GARDIN + LIC

### **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 editor of the eminent literary journal *Romboid*. A writer of prose works distinguished by their aesthetic qualities, multiplicity of meaning and development of several narratives simultaneously, Pavel Vilikovský is a representative of postmodern Slovak literature. Among his most important works are the novella *Kôň na poschodí, slepec vo Vrábľoch* (Horse on the First Floor, A Blind Man in Vráble, 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 published work also includes the 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***  
**(Horse on the First Floor,  
A Blind Man in Vráble)**

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 Pieces)**

HUNGARIAN:  
***Vlastný životopis zla***  
**(Autobiography of Evil)**

CZECH:  
***Pes na ceste***  
**(Dog on the Road)**

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

**Pavel Vilikovský**  
***Krásna strojvodkyňa, krutá vojvodkyňa***

Published by:  
Slovart  
Bratislava, 2017, 183 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8955-023-4



**Translation Rights:**  
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PAVEL  
**Vilikovský**

KRÁSNA STROJVODKYŇA,  
KRUTÁ VOJVODKYŇA



(She sells seashells)

Why should anyone care: On the other side of the road a small group of children is walking up a hill. It must be a school field trip. A woman in a bright red jacket shouts at them from the top of a forest path, "Come on, come on!" It's a sunny but cool September day; remnants of the morning fog still hang between the trees. Puddles left by last night's rain line the side of the road, and a shy sun is just beginning to look into them.

But why should anyone care.

\*

Why should anyone care: On the opposite sidewalk stand a man and a woman. The woman looks at her watch and says, "We need to go; I have a client at 11:30. I'll drop you off at the trolleybus stop so that I'm not late, OK?" The man is oblivious, absently watching the last child climbing up the hill. It's a boy in a thin green coat with a hood. His tennis shoes are slipping, and he keeps catching himself with his hands. From a distance it looks as though he's playing in the grass, looking for a coin or a set of keys that has fallen out of his pocket. When he stands up, his hands are covered in wet leaves; he wipes them on his coat. What a dolt, he'll get all dirty, the man thinks idly, I'm sure his parents will be thrilled. Then he realizes that the coat looks familiar, and looks up at the boy's blonde hair.

"OK?" the woman asks again. "Fine," the man replies automatically, as if he were responding to the greeting of a passerby. He doesn't even glance at her; his eyes are still on the hill.

But why should anyone care.

\*

Why should anyone care: The man just realized that the boy is his son. The recognition is as sudden as if someone had shone a bright flashlight in his face in the dark. He's so clumsy, the man thinks tenderly. And while tender thinking may not be possible, the word "clumsy" certainly doesn't carry any hint of reproach or mockery. I must tell him to put his feet at an angle, perpendicular to the hill, so they don't slip, he thought. And he should have proper footwear for the forest. Boots.

For a moment longer he pushes the boy up the hill with his eyes. The boy makes it to the path. "Of course, Patrik, last as usual," the teacher in the red jacket exclaims. The man doesn't recall the boy mentioning a field trip that morning, but he wasn't the one getting him ready for school; she was. Not this one, a different she.

“Are you listening to me at all?” this one says. “I have to take Karin to her music lesson at three, but then I’ll have an hour before I have to go get her.”

The man turns around and catches up to her in a few quick steps. “I’m not sure,” he says. “I don’t think I can make it today. I have something then.”

The boy was far away, now the woman seems too close. The geometry of it feels off to him. Distorted perspective, as if he had a different prescription in each eye.

“In Venice all mirrors are Venetian,” the beautiful engineer said with a smile. “Even your cheap cracked pocket mirror. The trick is getting it to Venice.”

But why should anyone care.

\*

Why should anyone care: In today’s lesson plan she writes across all four class periods, “Field trip. Educational goal: Getting to know nature around us and learning how to behave outdoors.” A contractor who’s running behind schedule is replacing the old windows in her classroom with new ones, and the principal has assigned the class an alternate activity.

The man doesn’t know about the note on the lesson plan, but if he saw it, he would have objections against the word “nature.” In his mind a forested park in Bratislava is not nature. Cars drive through it on paved roads, and there’s even a regular city bus that stops there. The trees seem tame, tied to the road like a dog, while to him nature is a wolf. He likes wolves, though he has no desire to meet one. He’s quite content to see them on television or in photographs.

The woman sees nature in everything, including a fallen chestnut, a floating feather, or a potted geranium on a balcony. Nature is like an older sister with whom she had shared a room growing up, and that’s how she treats her. She’s not embarrassed to show her feelings in front of her; if anything, nature brings out an emotional outpouring from her. She’s relaxed there, laughs out loud, unbuttons her tight pantsuit. In town, on the other hand, she’s a decisive, no-nonsense woman; that’s who she was when he had met her for the first time at a business meeting. That’s who had caught his interest, and when he ran into her on Market Street one day, he invited her to a nearby café; by now he can’t remember which one. She came.

But why should anyone care.

\*

Why should anyone care: “Too bad,” the woman says, “because we won’t see each other tomorrow. It’s going to be a busy day for me.”

The man thinks that his rejection has offended her, that she’s not used to getting no for an answer and is pouting. He thinks she’s trying to use emotional blackmail. No, that may be a stretch, but he does think that her statement is a challenge: If you can, so can I. The truth is he’s not sure. He doesn’t know the real woman, he only *thinks* her. As far as he’s concerned, she’s entirely thought up. Her relationship to nature is also thought up; she has never spoken about it so openly. And he also *thinks* the boy, at the moment, tenderly. If that’s at all possible.

He doesn’t mention the boy to her. He thinks the boy would be a wedge, driving them further apart, distancing her from him – as it is, he’s the only one distanced. He thinks he can handle it. He’ll cover for it so she doesn’t notice a thing. The distance isn’t anyone’s fault; it just happened. By chance. Truth be told, she was the one who wanted to get some fresh air and not sit in a smoky café. How should he have known that his son’s class would be going to the same place? Besides which, the woman speaks about her daughter freely, whenever she likes; even now she’s using her as a pragmatic, indisputable argument.

For a while they walk in silence. He feels her by his side. She’s close, he could touch her, but he doesn’t. He just thinks her. He thinks that she’s disappointed that they won’t see each other in the afternoon, and that’s a good thing. It means that she’d like to be with him. That she enjoys being with him.

“Too bad,” he says. “I don’t mean about tomorrow, I mean that I can’t make it today. The boy has a parent teacher conference I have to go to.”

It’s not true, but the man thinks it’s a merciful lie. He thinks he has offered an olive branch, while at the same time he has given the boy his due. Karin has her music lesson; Patrik has a parent teacher conference. They’re even; a fair balance has been achieved.

The woman doesn’t say a word; she just glances at him (it’s such a quick glance that he doesn’t have time to read it: was it inquisitive, mocking, suspicious?) and keeps walking. The parking lot appears around the bend, three, maybe five hundred feet away. He’s glad. Right now, the woman, the way she is, is distracting him. Getting in the way of his thinking.

But why should anyone care.

# Anton Hykisch

## *Trust the Emperor*

*Anton Hykisch's new historical novel Trust the Emperor is set in the declining years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, on the eve of the French Revolution.*

Can one make millions of people happy quickly, without love, and often against their will? Light is shed on these questions in Anton Hykisch's new historical novel, set in the declining years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, on the eve of the French Revolution. This is a free continuation of his successful novel *Milujte kráľovnú* (Love the Queen). The Emperor Joseph II had been waiting for years for the death of his mother Maria Teresa. Immediately after her demise he began impatiently making a reality of his dream of just government. In feverish, self-destructing work he sought to forget his own personal misfortune and lack of love. The novel uncovers the painful private life of the young ruler, up to the point of his premature and tragic end. The decade of Joseph II's rule is also the beginning of the Slovaks' national awakening. On the pages of this book we encounter Slovak writer Jozef Ignác Bajza and his torment during the writing of the first Slovak novel. We are acquainted with life in old Bratislava (formerly named Pressburg), where Anton Bernolák and his friends created the first Slovak grammar in a seminar at the castle. This gripping novel allows us to look into the lives of European rulers, the highest church dignitaries, and poor village priests. We will make our way to little-known corners of the far-flung Habsburg monarchy. Hykisch's new novel is a book about passion for power, a chronicle of the destinies of people who rejected the everyday and sought to change the life round about them.



*“My latest novel is once again historical. The plot is played out in Europe almost in its entirety, at rulers’ courts in St. Petersburg and the Crimea, in Transylvania, Vienna, Bratislava... I am describing the last ten years of the government of the Emperor Joseph II. Some say he was good, others evil. He was a reformer, but we know little about his personal life: it was tough, extremely tragic, lonely. He began to introduce German and the languages of other nations instead of Latin.”*



PHOTO (C) LUCIA GARDIN + LIC

### Anton Hykisch (1932)

Slovak prose-writer, essayist and author of non-fiction works. He studied at the University of Economics in Bratislava. From 1962 to 1969 he worked as an editor in Czechoslovak Radio. After the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, due to his political attitudes he was not allowed to publish anything. From 1988 he was economic deputy at the Mladé letá publishing house, afterwards its director. During the years 1992 to 1997 he was the Slovak Republic’s ambassador to Canada. His most successful books include the historical novels *Čas majstrov* (Time of the Masters, 1981) and *Milujte kráľovnú* (Love the Queen, 2003). In these works Hykisch takes contemporary source materials as his starting-point. 2009 saw the appearance of his novel *Rozkoše dávnych čias* (Delights of Far-off Times), where he returns to the events of 1968. In 2012 he published a book of memories of Banská Štiavnica, his native town: *Moja Štiavnica* (My Štiavnica). His latest book is the historical novel *Verte cisárovi* (Believe the Emperor, 2016), which is issued in Czech translation by the Host publishing house. Hykisch’s new novel is a book about passion and desire for power, and a chronicle of persons who have rejected the everyday and are striving to change the life around them. Works of his have appeared in German, English, Arabic, Hungarian, Polish and Bulgarian.

### Translated titles:

#### ARABIC:

قتل قولا

#### (Killers)

Sphinx Agency, Cairo 2009

#### CZECH:

#### *Rozkoše dávnych čias*

#### (Pleasure of old times)

Slovenský literárny klub v ČR, Praha 2014

#### *Věřte císaři*

#### (Trust the Emperor)

Host, Brno 2017

#### GERMAN:

#### *Zeit der Meister*

#### (Masters’ Time)

Wieser Verlag, Klagenfurt 2007

#### POLISH:

#### *Kochajcie królowa*

#### (Love the Queen)

Spolok Slovákov v Poľsku, Kraków 2003

### Anton Hykisch

#### *Verte cisárovi*

Published by:  
Vydavateľstvo Spolku  
slovenských spisovateľov  
Bratislava, 2016, 432 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8061-930-5



#### Translation Rights:

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A detailed oil painting of Alexander I of Russia, depicted from the chest up. He is wearing a white high-collared coat over a brown military-style jacket with gold buttons and a red sash with a gold emblem. He has a powdered wig and is holding a white document in his left hand. The background is a dark, neutral tone.

*Alexander  
Cisarovi*

ANTON HYKISCH

It was a mild early evening in spring. A handsome young man with a noticeably alarmed expression on his face was running down the narrow Schönlanterngasse. He had already glimpsed the two towers of the Jesuit church and the university building. A minute more and I shall be in time for supper. His hobnail boots pounded jarringly on the gravel-strewn surface of the little street. A publican was standing outside in his white apron, hoping to lure a visitor, but he quickly stepped out of the path of the breathless youth. He saw young men running past like this every evening. Poor things, they had to hurry. The regimen at the Pázmáneum was strict. It was only on rare occasions that one of the boys escaped for a glass of beer to *Zum Basilisken*. They preferred to find a little pub further away at the Old Market, where the seminary's rector wouldn't catch sight of them.

His cassock was hindering him. He had been running almost from St. Stephen's Cathedral. Up to that point he had been going from Hofburg at a more measured pace. His outing that day had been to the treasury in the Swiss Wing of the imperial palace. Nearly all of his countrymen were in a state of excitement. Was the news really true that the rector had brought from Prešporok?

He almost crashed through the last glass door. He tripped over his cassock; it was already torn.

"Well, of course, Bernolák! Last as always," muttered the seminarist on duty, crossing out Anton Bernolák's name in the open book at the porter's office.

"Listen, it's true!" gasped Bernolák, wiping his perspiring brow. "Incredible!"

More of the inmates crowded around the porter's office. "Come on, Bernolák! What did you find out?"

"I saw... I saw them."

"What did you see? Out with it!"

"The Crown guards. Count Keglevich..." Bernolák couldn't catch his breath. "And four men-at-arms. And the chest."

"The chest as well?"

"The chest as well, sirs. Its lock had been knocked off. I saw two soldiers grab the chest with metal fittings and carry it off under the arches of the imperial treasury. Don't you believe me?" He looked around. "I swear it." Bernolák, who was rather short in stature, tried slapping his heaving chest.

"Isn't that a false oath, Bernolák?"

"Quiet. This is a historic moment," said a darkly tanned Croatian.

# Maroš Krajňak

## *Pogodowitz*

Strictly in his own way, a pathological individual can destroy evil in the name of good and think he is going to change the stupefied mass.

In his latest book *Pogodowitz* Maroš Krajňak shifts location from the specifically east European region and even beyond the limits of central Europe, and he confronts the backward parts of Slovakia with civilised life in its mature form, the “great” world. Cutting through various time planes, but also through (sur)reality with virtuality, Krajňak again convincingly proves that no one (not even a representative of the church), in any time or place, is without guilt. From Krajňak’s prose one hears the urgent, even bone-chilling cry of the victim, who is potentially “a son of Satan” just as much as his persecutor or manipulator...

*“The book as a whole (perhaps in opposition to the author’s purpose) does not undermine the protagonist’s conception of life but rather discreetly advertises its splendour.”* VLADIMÍR BARBORÍK



### **Maroš Krajňak (1972)**

In 2006 he graduated from the International Business School in Brno. His professional career has been focused long-term on marketing, in the field of telecommunication services and the internet. Krajňak’s work on one particular genealogical project, which enabled him to travel widely in this geographical region, was an important inspiration for some of the real-life stories recorded in his debut volume *Carpathia* (2011). He followed up his successful debut with *Entropia* (Entropy, 2012). A loose trilogy with a Rusyn theme culminated in 2013 with *Informácia* (The Information). This author’s noteworthy place in Slovak literature is confirmed by the fact that all three of his prose works were nominated for the Anasoft litera Prize in the years 2012, 2013 and 2014 respectively.

### **Translated titles:**

CZECH:

***Carpathia***

Větrné mlýny, Brno, 2014

**Maroš Krajňak**

***Pogodowitz***

Published by:

OZ Brak

Bratislava 2017, 132 p.

ISBN: 978-80-972028-6-6



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# Pogodowitz



Maroš  
Krajňak



BRAN

*Threefoldgood* has been completed and *Fourfoldgood* with Sabol has followed and will soon become *Fivefoldgood*, then maybe *Sixfoldgood* and so on, considering that the number of possibilities is limitless? I am an eighty-year-old man walking through a rippling meadow, an old man with an uneasy conscience, because he has just remembered a paraphrase of the well-known saying about saving life, my version being: If I have not done all the good I had the means to do, I have not done enough.

I am an old man; a boy is running ahead of me and hiding behind telephone poles, he thinks I can't see him. Or the other way round. Pogodowitz is a playful child and imagines how he will be decades later; he is trying to extend and divert the period before that future.

When I return home from the meadow, I change out of my wet clothes and I realize a new grievance; for example, I discover that my book on birds has disappeared; I have still to read about partridges; I become anxious, as if afraid that one day they really will vanish from our fields; that the whole species will become extinct. I hurry down the earthen path, startling the birds that are still there; old B. calls something out to me from the roof, but I can't see him through the branches of the trees. By the time I reach the house he has put on a dark brown suit and transferred himself to the pub, where his complexion has darkened, adapting itself to the colour of his clothes; he has become quite motionless, taking on the likeness of a roll of thick synthetic material.

Once we carried a dead body together; we had to lift it from the death bed and put it in a coffin; it made old B. nauseous, he felt sick, but he managed it. I remember the large family feasts that took place regularly on Sundays when, urged on by the hosts (B. and his wife) and the guilty feelings they stirred in them, the children ate far too much.

I was influenced by a blind man who managed to hide his handicap from me until I was an adolescent. When I was a small boy he used to lead me around the surrounding rugged landscape; I would listen to his fascinating commentary and on occasion he led me over a flooded river by a narrow footbridge that was no more than a long, narrow tree trunk. Before I went to bed he taught me to play cards; he knew how to hoodwink me in such a way that without hesitation I gave away what I had in my hand and then he took charge of everything. I was looked after by a short-sighted illiterate woman without glasses, who used to read books to me and was forever emphasizing that she couldn't read, that she was only guessing the text from the illustrations.

# Silvester Lavrík

## *Sunday Chess with Tiso*

*A fascinating historical novel, inspired by events which occurred during the period of the Slovak state (1939-1945). The narrator is an eye-witness, the clerk Anička. Real characters and masterly fiction offer a fluently changing perspective on President Tiso, an exceptionally controversial figure in Slovak history.*

The story, rich in contemporary realia and with much laughter through tears, is told by Anička. She recalls how the Slovak president and parish priest Jozef Tiso used to go to Bánovce every Sunday to say Mass, and for a game of chess and a chat in the family home of the respectable pharmacist. Was Tiso ultimately more a statesman or a priest?

Lavrík proceeds unsystematically to address this question, using personal testimonies. Without prettifying or brutalising, he recasts things in literary language. He does not write directly about Tiso but rather through the eyes of Anička, with her cheerless family background – owing to the absence of her father and her bad relationship with her mother, and the latter's fits of rage, she has ended up in the position of a local outsider. Her only joys come

from her cousins Alica, Sidónia and Matilda, from the pharmacist, and from working for Monsignor Tiso: "The truth is, I became so greatly attached to the Monsignor that I'd have done anything for him". Anička's literary efforts are naïve but moving, and in places they capture with bone-chilling intensity the reality, or the contemporary mood, of the civil society for which Tiso was the architect of its independence. Initially the author introduces the idyllic atmosphere built around the Tiso myth. At the same time, however, Lavrík sees Tiso as a strategist who has learned to play on several chessboards, not hesitating to sacrifice pawns, adhering to the tactical vision that one cannot achieve ultimate victory without victims. The novel is based on three sources: historical factography, oral transmission, and the author's fiction.



*“The historical facts, key events and crucial speeches of deputy and president Tiso are real. Many of them are sketched from contemporary newspaper reports. The story is inspired by people who lived in Bánovce and who at key moments probably responded like the characters in the book, because that is how it has been preserved in the collective memory of the place.”*



PHOTO (C) LUCIA GARDIN + LIC

#### **Silvester Lavrík (1964)**

After studying at Pavel Jozef Šafárik University in Prešov, he worked as a teacher of Slovak and art education. Later he founded the amateur theatre association BáPoDi, where he also worked as director. After a variety of employment he moved to Bratislava, where he studied stage direction at the Academy of Performing Arts and worked as an editor of Slovak Radio. As an author and director of plays he has collaborated with several professional theatre companies in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, in Zlín, Prague, České Budějovice and Ostrava, and also in Budapest. From 2000 he was artistic leader of the Zlín Urban Theatre, afterwards editor-in-chief at Slovak Radio – Radio Devín; currently he is Project manager of Radio Litera and Radio Klasika. His best-known prose works include *Allegra barbaro* (nine stories 2002), *Villa Lola* (2004), *Zlodeji* (Thieves, a collection of story texts, 2005), *Perokresba* (Pen Sketch, 2006), *Zu* (novel, 2011), *Naivné modlitby* (Naive Prayers, novel, 2013) and his latest novel *Nedelné šachy s Tisom* (Sunday Chess with Tiso, 2016), which has been nominated for the Anasoft litera Prize. Silvester Lavrík is a multi-dimensional figure, of whom one cannot decide unambiguously whether he is more in evidence as prose-writer, dramatist, theatre manager, director, publicist, commentator on cultural activity, or essayist. Lavrík gives a dimension of fantasy to events of ordinary life, fusing some senseless or irrational element with the world of reality from which one starts; he disturbs the real proportions, while the absurd moment urgently highlights the main characters' loneliness and emotional emptiness.

#### **Translated titles:**

CZECH:

**Zu**

**(Zu)**

Větrné mlýny, Brno 2015

HUNGARIAN:

**Irina és az ördög**

**(Irina and Devil)**

Kalligram, Bratislava 2010

POLISH:

**Zu**

**(Zu)**

Foundation of Culture and Education of Tymoteusz Karpowicz, Wrocław 2016

**Silvester Lavrík**

***Nedelné šachy s Tisom***

Published by:

Dixit

Bratislava 2016, 412 p.

ISBN: 978-80-89662-19-7



**Translation Rights:**

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# Nedeľné šachy

s Tisom

Silvester Lavrík



## On Sunday the Baláks quarrelled

On account of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact. Mainly because of some point that had been kept secret in the agreement between Hitler's foreign minister and Comrade Stalin's. Lackeys can only make lackeys' agreements; anyway, it would be in Berlin and Moscow that the carving up would be done, that's what I said and I was right, the pharmacist kept repeating over and over again. He was pacing the room from the window to the door and Mrs Maria kept standing in his path. She said he had no right to belittle everything that had been done in the last few years, whether in the town or in the state. Schools, roads, the public sector, cultural facilities and water mains for the whole town! And if the pharmacist couldn't see even that, then it was no doubt because he shut himself up too often in his study and overindulged in his vices, drinking his patented alcohol and listening to radio broadcasts from London, and maybe from Moscow of all places! My mother stood up, saying we would be going, but Mrs Maria stopped her and told us to stay. Let us see what she had to put up with at home! Her words didn't make her pharmacist husband angry; he just pulled a letter out of his waistcoat pocket.

He had received it from an old friend, also a pharmacist, called Guldenfinger; we knew him too, if only from what our host had told us and from the labels on some of the preparations sold here, in the *Pod platenom* pharmacist's. Guldenfinger had closed down his pharmacy five years ago; at one time they used to correspond and even visit each other, but this was the first time he had written since he had left to join his brother in Denmark. Mr Friedl brought the letter, via Červienka from Trenčín. It said that the Danish king had pinned a yellow star to his coat and gone like this to stand in front of his citizens when they wanted to drive the Jews out of their shops and pharmacies and houses. Apparently he told them to add him to the list of names of Jewish Danish citizens. Do you get that, my dear wife? he snapped at her, waving the letter. The Danish king asked the officials to put him on the list of Jews! And what do you mean by that, dear husband? retorted his wife, looking offended. Because I don't understand why you have to mention Danish Jews, as if we didn't have enough of our own. That's just it, replied the pharmacist and laughed. A Jew is a Jew, whether in Denmark or in Slovakia. What do we need such lists for? Are we so much more finicky than the Danes or the Swedes or the Americans that for us a Jew stinks, but not for them? Isn't it by any chance quite the opposite? Isn't it that ever since we've had our own state we've got too big for our boots for the very reason that this is a state of peasants and labourers?

# Daniel Majling

## *The Ruzzian Clazzics*

*Recently, on the Ukrainian-Slovak border, they found a lorry full of fake literature. Dostoyewski, Toolstoy, Turgeneff, Checkoff – all names like something lifted from a Chinese market with false brands. Do you find that distinctly reminiscent of someone or other? The Russian literary greats, of course.*

In out-of-the-way Slovak villages we fairly often encounter people who have something by “Checkoff” on a shelf and, since they’ve read this cheap hackwork, they think they’re initiated competent to discuss the great Russian classic themes such as God, love, immortality, crime, punishment and death. But actually it’s hard to discuss the great questions of being with people brought up on these copies of “the Russian classics”, because although at first glance the Russian classics by their choice of themes, characters and settings truly are reminiscent of real Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Turgenev, on a second reading their values cease to be of the present day. Daniel Majling has gathered these stories and published them in *The Ruzzian Clazzics*.

*“On Facebook I found a Daniel Majling who lives in Stockholm. I asked him if the name meant something in Swedish. He replied that the month of May is “maj” in Swedish and “ling” means flower, so that Majling should mean Mayflower. I am sticking to this fine interpretation and I’m not going to check it, in case it might be totally disproved.”*



**Daniel Majling (1980)**

A stage dramaturge in the Slovak National Theatre, author of the successful comic book *Rudo* (2015), and most recently also a writer. Theatrical performances which he has worked on have won a number of prizes, among them DOSKA 2008 and 2014, the most prestigious Slovak theatrical award, and also the Czech Alfréd Radok Prize 2012. In 2014 he was awarded the Tatra banka’s Young Artist prize for the dramaturgy of *Láskavé bohyně* (The Kind Goddesses). He loves to mystify, he is adept at inventing or philosophising, and always with a clear aim: to hit the nail right on the head. He lives in Bratislava and writes in the remote Slovak countryside, in the region called Gemer.

**Translated titles:**

CZECH:

***Rudo. Komiksové povídky***  
**(Rudo. Comics Short Stories)**

Labyrint, Praha 2015

**Daniel Majling**  
***Ruzká klazika***

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**ANTOLÓGIA POVIEDOK**

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# Ruzká klazika

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**ZOSTAVIL A PRELOŽIL**



**Daniel Majling**

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**TOTO NIE JE BRAX**



“Excuse me, Anton Pavlovitch but Fiodor is an amateur biologist,” and the doctor turned to Checkoff to explain. “He has a lot of books about nature at home. Before you came he was telling me about how in one of Darwin’s books he had read that scraping a thin wire with a file can produce a sound like the mating call of a certain kind of cicada. Males of the species can apparently attract females with the call. We have no cicadas here but Fiodor wanted to try it on our *uskoshky*. Like female mosquitoes, the female *uskoshky* drink blood.” “So all those horrible creatures that want to get intimate with us are females?” said Checkoff with amusement, picking from his cup of tea a black female insect drowning there in the throes of passion. The teacher Fiodor nodded with a smile. He was clearly very pleased that his experiment with the wire was working. “If I am not mistaken it is the thirty-fourth species of which Fiodor has been able to attract the female. He is the person with the greatest sexual attraction in the world,” said Doctor Shikulin without the hint of a smile. As if to confirm the doctor’s words, the cross-eyed teacher in the greasy shirt stood up next to the balustrade and started to send out strange sounds in the direction of the lake. They were the sounds of a madman.

“Whenever Fiodor comes for a visit, I have to lock my dog up in the shed because he drives her wild. He puts something under her muzzle and she immediately goes into heat. Once he concocted such a powerful musk, four she-bears turned up in the village. Another time, when it was winter and we had no food left to eat, he started snorting up at the mountain and called a big beautiful hind down even though it was long before the mating season. We shot her from the terrace and the whole village had a feast.”

At that moment some little yellow birds which Fiodor had summoned from the lake started to fly in. They were females wishing to mate but when they saw there was no one with whom to do it, they started pecking at all the insects on the terrace. Perhaps they did it out of hunger or perhaps out of jealousy. Or – and this is the most probable explanation – they were compensating for their disappointment by overeating – in the same way human females do. Whatever the case, Shikulin and Checkoff were both glad that the cross-eyed teacher was using his miraculous powers of seduction to get rid of those annoying insects. The teacher again grinned, proud of his sexual attraction. Checkoff looked more closely at his ugly face, this time with much greater interest than at the start of the visit. And as he looked, a humorous new story started coming into his head, one which he would send first thing the next day to his Moscow publisher.

# Ondrej Štefánik

## *I'm Paula*

*I'm Paula is such a simple statement that the novel's heroine Paula, living in an intricate time, must give it an intricate recasting.*

The novel depicts the disintegration of our world or rather, the disintegration of its natural and vital structures, mechanisms of self-preservation, relationships and identifications, of human order and meaningful existence, as it unfolds in casual scenes of everyday life. At the same time, the novel is a family drama showing society and individual human beings interconnected by invisible threads. It demonstrates who we are, what we didn't want to become, who we could have become, who we used to be and who we will never be again. It shows us what we've lost, what we've forfeited and what we'll never be able to bring back. Štefánik's book presents both a diagnosis and a warning. He tackles the theme of family in a non-traditional way, shunning old-fashioned posturing and offering only a convincing, uncompromising realism.

Štefánik's reflections and observations are revealing and surprising. The novel is divided into two parts. Part one is set in the present, part two in the near future.



*“The second part of the book is not the form of the future as I see it. Nor is it me at this moment trying to sketch out some vision of the future. I wrote it rather as the present time, the way I see it. There’s a sci-fi backdrop, but that’s all.”*



### Ondrej Štefánik (1978)

He’d planned to make his debut with a novel, but while writing it he began to get tired of the main character, so he took a break. During that intermission he produced his debut short story collection *Pštrosí muž* (Ostrich Man, 2011). In the end, though, he got to like the hero of his novel and he finished it. *Bezprsté mesto* (Fingerless City, 2012) also pleased the Anasoft litera jury and made its way to the shortlist. His latest novel *Som Paula* (I’m Paula, 2016) is one of the most remarkable works on the Slovak literary scene in recent times.

### Translated titles:

HUNGARIAN:

***Ujjatlan város***  
**(Fingerless City)**

Typotex Világirodalom, Budapest 2016

**Ondrej Štefánik**  
***Som Paula***

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# Som Paula

ONDREJ ŠTEFÁNIK

Paula's boss entered the restaurant in the company of a girlfriend. Paula turned her head to the wall so he wouldn't notice her. She really wasn't in the mood for him. Oh no, not him, he was the last person she wanted to see.

"Hi Paula, feeling better now?" her boss asked, shaking hands with Kristian. Paula felt like fainting. She wished she would faint.

I just asked her if she was feeling better and she fainted. Her husband and I had to bring her round.

I just asked her if she was feeling better and she fainted. Her husband and I had to bring her round.

I just asked her if she was feeling better and she...

How do you protect yourself from a question like this? Paula could read his mind, could see herself in his thoughts, casually tossed there, stripped naked, a vibrator inserted in her rear, she's feeling better there.

"Hi, Paula, feeling better now?"

What a pain in the neck, he wants to squeeze Paula into a couple of words, into a single question. For him Paula was a boneless body, an Adam's rib made of rubber that could be folded into a single simple sentence. He thought he could take her apart with one move like an uncomplicated mechanical engine that was playing up a bit. She wished the trout on her plate could answer instead of her. The trout's head. With its body split open the trout looked like a butterfly with its wings outspread.

"Hi, Paula, feeling better now?"

Should I be feeling better now? Is it past the deadline? What's the deadline for feeling better?

Am I ready to send myself to the client for approval, or go straight to print? Why doesn't the stupid trout say anything? Please, Kristian, tell my boss that I'm not going to leave you the way he was left by his wife, we're not like them.

Who's that slut by my boss's side? Who is she? Why is she giving me that brazen smile? Does she think I'm sleeping with him, that I sleep with my boss? Why is she smiling at my husband? Does this slut sleep with Kristian? Do the three of them sleep together? A threesome? Has this slut seen my husband's penis?

Did she study his penis when I posted it on Facebook? She liked it. She liked the whole world. The slut believed the world was created just so that she could like it.

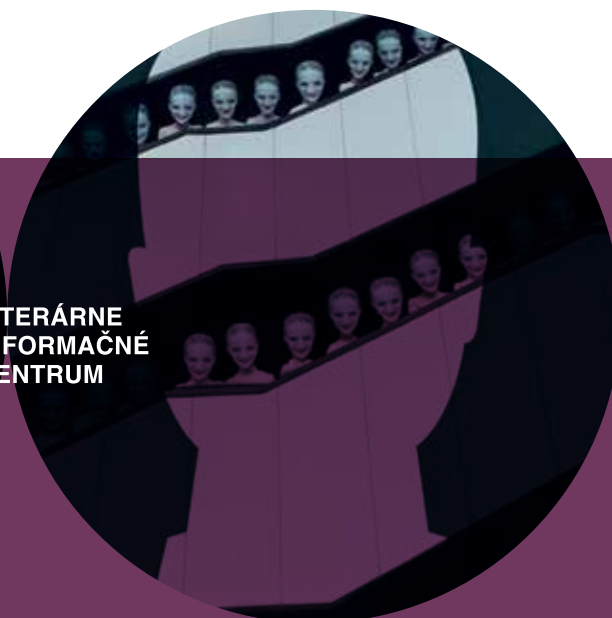
So had she seen his penis before? Hi Paula, feeling better now? I just asked her if she was feeling better and she fainted.



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Ruzka  
klazika

ZOSTAVIL A PRELOŽIL

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Som Paula  
ONDREJ ŠTEFÁNIK