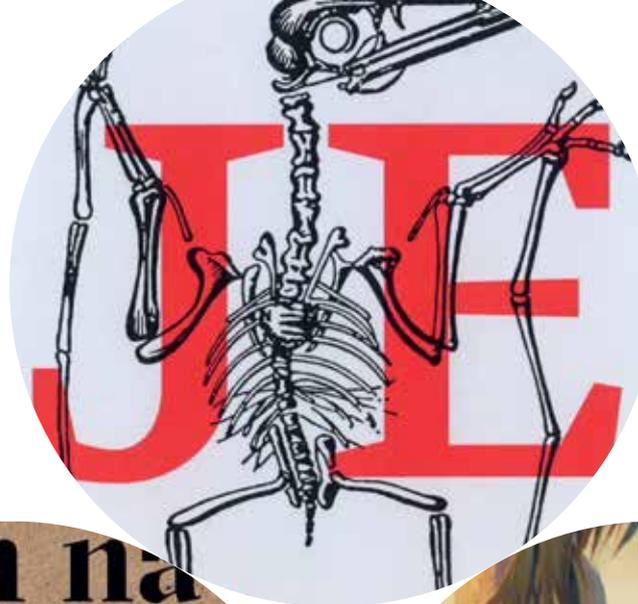


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on Literature  
Bratislava



# Books from Slovakia 2019

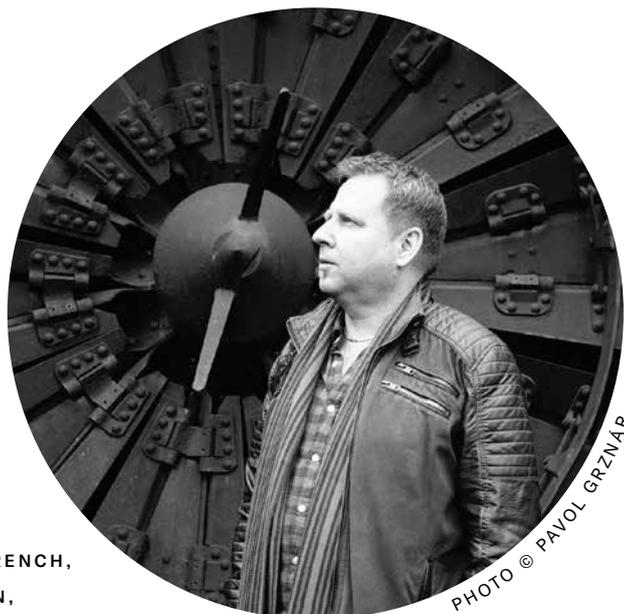


# Balla *Is Dead*

*Balla is definitely not dead. Quite the opposite, the “Slovak Kafka” and master of short-form writing is back in full force. Because, as one of the characters from his latest book says, “A good aphorism is better than a bad novel.”*

Balla is a provocateur, a voluntary outsider, and most importantly, a brilliant writer, who doesn't allow his readers to remain passive toward his fiction. In his latest book, *Is Dead*, he returns to short-form writing. The book contains everything: love, death, fame, money, banality, disillusionment, conspiracy, truth and self-deception, futility and vanity. But Balla also examines his readers, non-readers, critics, non-critics, and of course, himself. Thus *Is Dead* is another piece of a puzzle – the big book Balla has been writing all his life, in which humour, irony, and even the cynicism of his characters, who are mostly “lost” souls, combine with the desire to live an intense, honest life, and to resist the banality of the everyday world.

“Sometimes everything’s easy to write.  
And when it’s easy to write, I feel that the  
writing is to the point and decent.”



### **Balla (1967)**

One of the most original writers on the Slovak literary scene, famous for his absurd short stories with a host of lonely, alienated, and strange individuals, incapable of having relationships with other human beings. Difficult family relationships frequently drive his stories, and although his outlook could be called pessimistic, his fiction is not devoid of humour. In 1996 he won the Ivan Krasko Prize for his first collection of short stories, *Leptokaria*. In 2011 he published the novella with autobiographical elements, *V mene otca* (In the Name of the Father), which won the prestigious Anasoft Litera Prize the following year. In 2015 he published *Veľká láska* (Big Love). Despite having won several important literary prizes, Balla lives outside the limelight, in the small town of Nové Zámky, where, like Franz Kafka, he works as a public official at the local Labour Office.

Translated titles:

CZECH, DUTCH, ENGLISH, FRENCH,  
GERMAN, HINDI, HUNGARIAN,  
UKRAINIAN:

***V mene otca***  
**(In the Name of the Father)**

CZECH, ENGLISH:

***Veľká láska***  
**(Big Love)**

Books of selected short stories:

CZECH:

***Naživu***  
**(Alive)**

POLISH:

***Podszepty***  
**(Prompting)**

***Świadek***  
**(The Witness)**

***Nepokój***  
**(Anxiety)**

SLOVENIAN:

***Dvosamljenost***  
**(Double-loneliness)**

**Balla**

***Je mŕtvy***

Published by:  
Koloman Kertész Bagala,  
Levice 2018, 224 p.

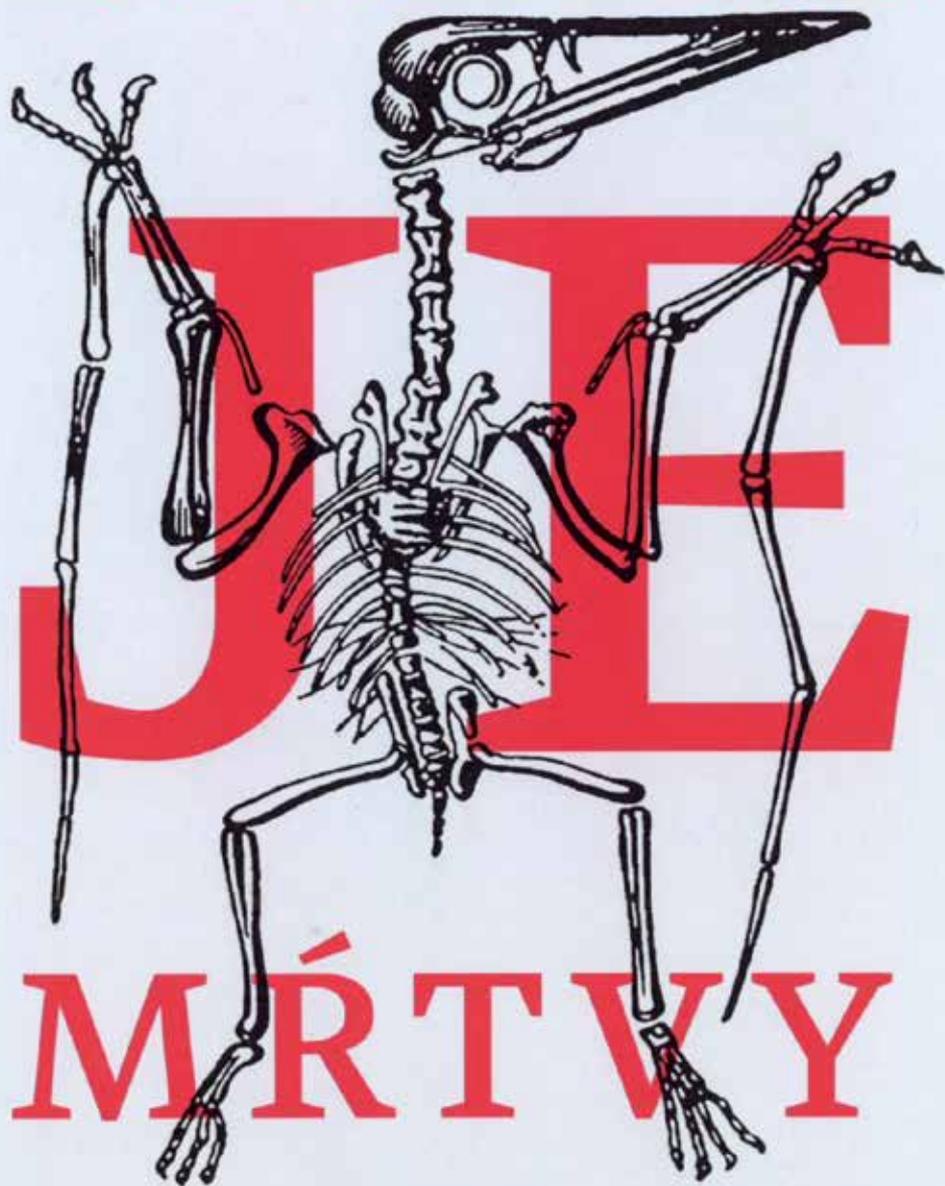
ISBN: 978-80-89973-15-6



**Translation Rights:**

*booksfromslovakia@litcentrum.sk*

BALLA



## Fate

I'm asleep.

My cell phone rings.

"Hello?"

"It's Kavec. What are you doing?"

"Writing a novel."

"Come pick up trash with us. Someone made a mess by the dam again."

We're picking up trash.

I don't care about the environment, I pick up trash out of spite; the majority isn't picking up, I am.

My cell phone rings.

It's a ministry official:

"What are you writing these days?"

"A short story."

"Could you turn it into an experimental novella? You'd get a grant."

"Me, a nobody?"

"We need you. With your strange writing you are creating the impression that we have freedom in our country, and with our grant we are creating the impression that the ministry supports freedom."

"But my short story, it's more like an aphorism. I don't have time for anything longer."

"What's keeping you busy?"

"Same as everyone else," I say and pick up a wad of paper from the weeds. It's a grimy magazine with a picture of a Mafioso by Danglár. Above a potbellied asshole with a gun there is a blood-red inscription: DON'T PIG OUT!

I take it personally.

Why shouldn't I pig out?

Danglár should leave me alone, I rage in my mind.

Headlines in other filthy newspapers announce a war with Hungary. The news fills many Slovaks with pride. Those whom it fills with fear and loathing keep their mouths shut, so there will be war.

I end the phone call:

"Accepting a grant would be against my principles."

"That's a good one!" The official laughs when he hears the word principles.

And Kavec barks out:

"A short story? An aphorism? You were telling me about a novel!"

"So? A good aphorism is better than a bad novel."

# Irena Brežná

## ***An Emigrant's Observations***

*An escape from  
a repressive regime–  
to a country with  
latent nationalism?*

Irena Brežná is a Slovak-Swiss author and in her book, *An Emigrant's Observations*, she documents the complicated emergence of her identity (linguistic, ethnic, civic) in the context of historical events which individuals can hardly influence. 1968. A Czechoslovak girl who has just finished secondary school defects to the West with her family to avoid the trauma of the Soviet occupation of her country. Unlike her parents, Irena did not live through the era of show trials and persecutions, but she was still affected in childhood by her mother's arrest, an event she briefly refers to in the first part of the book about the Prague Spring. Even in the country of the Helvetian cross, however, for all its positive macroeconomic indicators, not everything is ideal: votes for women, for instance, were only legalized in Switzerland on a federal level three years after Brežná's arrival. How does the author describe her new home? Not so appealingly – to her it is a 'cold paradise'.

*“We could not imagine ever returning – and my mother never did. But I still get a sense of euphoria whenever I see the abandoned customs building on the Slovak-Austrian border.”*



### **Irena Brežná (1950)**

Writer and journalist, she studied Slavic Studies, Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Basel before working as a psychologist, interpreter for refugees and war reporter in Chechnya. She has initiated and supported various humanitarian and cultural projects in Guinea, Slovakia, Russia and Chechnya. She writes mainly in German, her principal genres are literary reviews, essays and prose and many of her writings have been translated into different languages. She has won a number of awards including the Theodor Wolff prize for journalism in Berlin for her portrait of Chechnya activists. Her novel *Nevďačná cudzinka* (Ungrateful Foreigner, 2014) about a young immigrant's struggle for dignity in a host country expecting assimilation won both the Swiss Literary Prize and the Dominik Tatarka Award in Slovakia. In her novel *Na slepačích krídlach* (The Best of All Worlds, 2015) the author humorously describes the absurdities of a Socialist childhood in Czechoslovakia.

Translated titles:

*All books originally published in German.*

BELARUSIAN, CZECH,  
FRENCH, SLOVAK:

***Die beste aller Welten***  
**(The Best of All Worlds)**

FRENCH, HUNGARIAN, ITALIAN,  
MACEDONIAN, RUSSIAN,  
SLOVAK, SWEDISH:

***Die undankbare Fremde***  
**(Ungrateful Foreigner)**

CZECH, ITALIAN, SLOVAK:

***Die Wölfinnen von Sernovodsk***  
**(The Bitchwolf from Sernovodsk)**

**Irena Brežná**  
***Postrehy emigrantky***

Published by:  
Aspekt, Bratislava 2018, 240 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8151-061-8



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IRENA BREŽNÁ

# POSTREHY EMIGRANTKY

ESEJE  
PRÓZY  
REPORTÁŽE



ASPEKT 

It was 1984 and still the Cold War when at an African ball in Alsace a Guinean invited me to dance. He had studied in the ‘brotherly’ Soviet Union, spoke Russian and was now living as an emigrant in France. Sékou Touré, the pan-African-stroke-Communist dictator had just died and Guinea was shaking off the shackles of Communism. I learn it all in a few seconds swaying to the rhythm; a few weeks later I land at four a.m. in the tropical rain of Conakry with a blue passport of no nationality, a citizen of nowhere. I haven’t learnt French yet; instead I want to learn what will happen to my country. I can’t yet travel to Czechoslovakia but want to find out what comes after Communism in West Africa.

The Boiro concentration camp had just been evacuated, a place where people had died of hunger – with the blackest humour, they called it the *diète noire*. As part of their aid to the Third World, Czechoslovak secret police had been there teaching the locals how to use an electric current for torture – at the same time as Conakry, without electricity, lay in darkness. Some of the Boiro survivors tell me their stories and I record them with feelings of shame, respect and solidarity. I witness the country opening up, with many people falling into poverty while a few get rich. I keep coming back and soon am speaking French with a Guinean accent and walking in the heat with the same languid sway of the hips as the local women.

One day I am sitting in a Parisian café with Amadou Oury Baho, a Guinea emigrant and teacher of Maths at a lycée in Paris. He tells me that he wants to go back to Guinea.

“What do you plan to do there?”

“I want to open a library.”

In his eyes I see a large room amidst all the hot red dust; a cool oasis of silence, reflection and spiritual freedom.

“Do you need books?”

When I look back, I realize my involvement was rather dilettantish; ideas for good deeds often arise impulsively. Encouraged by this new idea, I immediately started to act, with neither a systematic plan nor an inkling that the whole project might just end in failure.

In the first consignment was a fine-smelling, completely untouched set of leather-bound adventure stories as well as novels by Marguerite Duras and Saul Bellow, all in French. Their presence and dignity were unmistakable. Could people hear the passion in my voice? Everyone in any way connected with books immediately understood, whether they were Swiss librarians, antiquarian bookdealers, publishers, lycée students, private individuals replying to my telephone calls with enthusiastic letters and packages of books.

# Ivana Dobrákovová

## ***Mothers and Lorry Drivers***

*Five women with stories that overlap and surprise the reader with their openness and physicality.*

Five female protagonists, five very different psychological probes into the character of a student, teenager, mother, wife, ex-wife, adult daughter of her mother and the schoolgirl daughter of an extraordinary father. Olivia is a mother of two children and an English teacher whose marriage has collapsed; Lara's marriage is merely formal; Veronika, a student, falls victim to a French dating agency and has virtual flirtations with lorry drivers; Svetlana discovers the madness of her maths genius of a father and Ivana, an invalid, is controlled by her domineering mother. Ivana Dobrákovová is one of the most powerful voices in contemporary Slovak prose, a claim endorsed by the awards she has won and the increasing number of translations of her work into foreign languages.

*“Each person’s fate is specific in some way; how we look at the world, ourselves, our bodies and family relationships, how each of us is anchored in reality. When writing I wonder: what if I lived there and not here, what if that and not this had happened to me, what if I’d had such-and-such an experience, how would I think, what would be important for me, would I know how to live with myself and if so, how?”*



**Ivana Dobráková (1982)**

Her published books are the short story collections *Prvá smrť v rodine* (First Death in the Family, 2009), *Toxo* (2013), *Matky a kamionisti* (Mothers and Lorry Drivers, 2018) and the novel *Bellevue* (2010). All four books reached the final of the Anasoft Litera Award, Mothers and Lorry Drivers also winning the European Union Prize for Literature. Her stories and novel have been published in several other European languages while she herself also works as a translator and has translated two novels by the French author Emmanuel Carrère, as well as the Italian *Neapolitan Novels* by Elena Ferrante. She lives in Turin.

Translated titles:

CZECH, HUNGARIAN:

**Toxo**

BULGARIAN, ENGLISH, POLISH:

**Bellevue**

HUNGARIAN:

**Prvá smrť v rodine**  
(**First Death in the Family**)

**Ivana Dobráková**  
***Matky a kamionisti***

Published by:  
Marenčin PT, Bratislava 2018, 157 p.

ISBN: 978-80-569-0041-3



**Translation Rights:**  
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IVANA DOBRAKOVÁ

MATKY A KAMIONISTI

GRAVITÀ  
REC...

His name is Pino, as in Pino Daniele, and like his namesake, he is also from Naples. Recently widowed, he is around forty-five with a receding hairline and a big wart on the left side of his nose. When I moved into my new flat a year ago, I was glad I had such a willing and handy neighbour. I can do my share of DIY but can't manage everything. And Pino has proved to be really helpful, as an electrician, as a makeshift plumber... He kept saying to me: whatever you need, Olivia, just give me a call, knock on my window – I'll be happy to help anytime. And when, after he had fixed a light switch or put my water seal together, I asked: what do I owe you, Pino? he just smiled: nothing, give me a kiss on the cheek, *va*. And I gave it to him, not without embarrassment, though later it just seemed like a nice gesture to me, typically Neapolitan, and I told myself that's his way, his warmth and openness, the kind of thing you don't see too much in Piedmont. And then once, in the yard in front of our block, he tried to hug me. He had some flowers in his hand which he said he was taking to his wife's grave; he'd had a drink or two and I was so surprised by the hug, I didn't even resist. And then he whispered to me: will you be at home this evening, Olivia? He was a bit tipsy – he had that disgusting alcohol breath drinkers have and I was really afraid he might hurt me. I pulled myself away and all evening, I sat at home in the dark anxiously. Was I afraid that he might break the door down and *overcome me*? Hard to say, but there came no knock at the door, he didn't come up a floor to find me but was probably asleep in front of the television sleeping off his hangover. We have never gone back to that incident – since then I don't rely on him to do my minor repairs anymore. The bad feeling is still there; I stiffen when we meet in the corridor or out in the yard even though he tries to be as genial as ever, the swine.

If it was only him... My mother jokes that I'm paranoid and makes fun of me, saying I take every neighbourly chit-chat as an attempt at seduction. But a woman can always tell, can see the difference between when a neighbour smiles politely and wishes her *buonasera*, and when he whispers hoarsely and drunkenly in her ear to ask whether she'll be at home that evening. And need I give such obvious examples? A woman knows when a man is looking at her amorously, when he would 'be interested' and when she is just air to him. And it seems to me that since I became an old maid, since I split up with the chump, men have been 'taking liberties' with me more and more, especially older men, the kind I would never consider, as if they were convinced I should be happy with anyone and grateful to them for fulfilling what they see as my basic need to have a cock between my legs, something which all old maids long for, just a bit of slap and tickle, because it must be obvious to women of my age that no-one would want to have a long-term relationship with them – there are younger women for that.

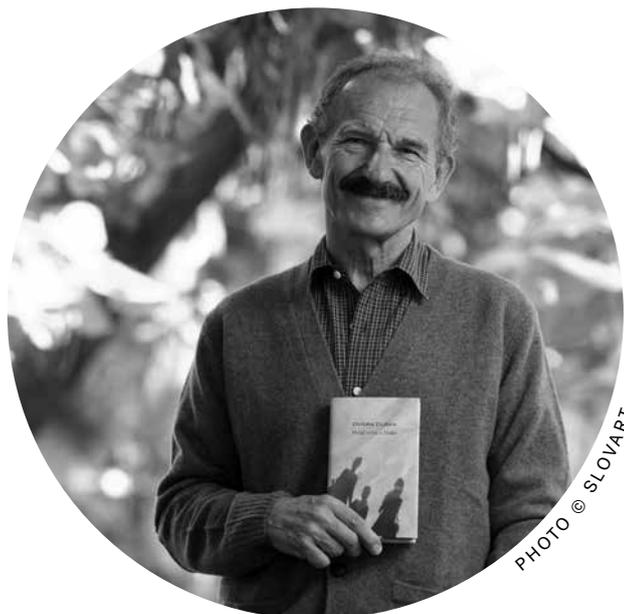
# Dušan Dušek

## ***The Cut of the Wind***

*A moving daily account  
of one man's departure  
from the world,  
a process beginning  
with forgetfulness.*

Thanks to his inimitably poetic style, Dušan Dušek is a legend of Slovak literature and in this, his latest book, he is at his most distinctive and poignant. This fragmented account of memory loss and the arduous struggle to keep it alive, together with the portrayal of a small child learning to speak and getting to know the world, create a deeply moving story. Dušek is a lyricist but an unsentimental one, a patient and perceptive observer who tries to slow down and grasp the last phase of his life with dignity. This short but concentrated novella has become an active instrument in this process.

*“Memories are not just moments from the past, short flashbacks and reminders of various details but they form the basic fabric of our life. It seems to us that we sometimes remember things but such memories are the very basis of our present.”*



### **Dušan Dušek (1946)**

All attempts at imitating Dušan Dušek's style end in failure. He started writing in the 1960s as a member of a strong generation which came into conflict with the régime of the time. Perhaps that is partly why his work is so diverse: he writes prose, poetry, scripts and essays and is particularly famous as a children's author. During his career he has won many literary awards and also collaborated with some of Slovakia's finest film directors. One of the country's most eminent authors, Dušek's most recent books are: *Mapky neznámého pobrežia* (Maps of an Unknown Coastline, 2001), *Vták na jednej nohe* (A Bird on One Leg, 2003), *Zima na ruky* (Cold on the Hands, 2006), *Holá veta o láske* (A Simple Sentence on Love, 2010).

Translated titles:

CZECH, GERMAN:

***Pešo do neba***  
**(On Foot to Heaven)**

CZECH:

***Holá veta o láske***  
**(A Simple Sentence on Love)**

SLOVENIAN:

***Gombíky zo starej uniformy***  
**(Buttons from an Old Uniform)**

SERBIAN:

***Zima na ruky***  
**(Cold on the Hands)**

ITALIAN:

***Babka na rebríku***  
**(Grandma on the Ladder)**

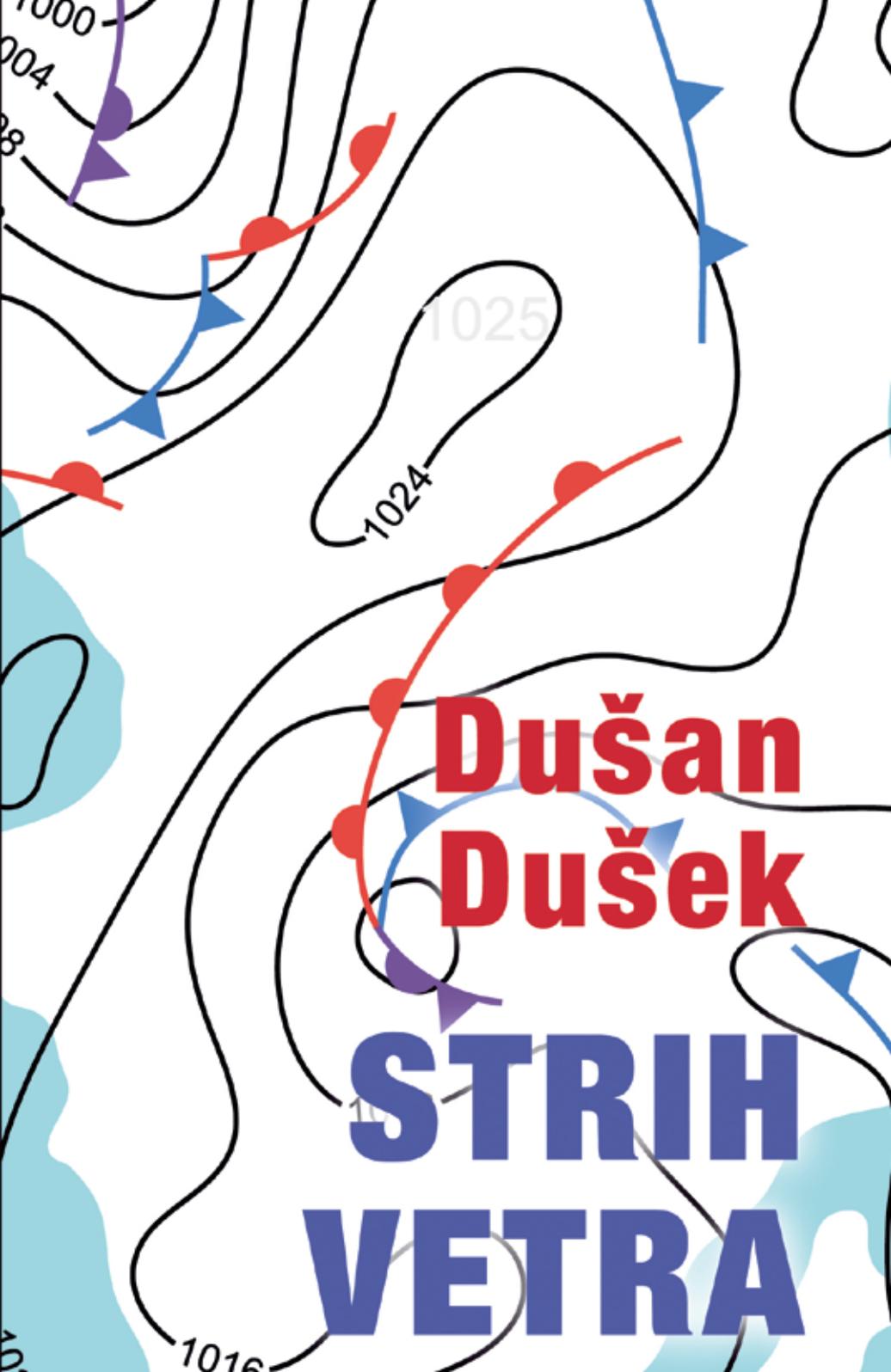
**Dušan Dušek**  
***Strih vetra***

Published by:  
Slovart, Bratislava 2018, 144 p.

ISBN: 978-80-556-3566-8



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**Dušan  
Dušek**

**STRIH  
VETRA**

We are meant to be writing. I will. I have trimmed my eyebrows; they were getting into my eyes, obstructing my view. There is no point in lying. Nor any necessity to tell the truth.

\*

Form sentences using the following words. A TABLE has four legs. A MAGPIE fires from a machine gun. A GARDEN is a source of a good mood. GARLIC is healthy – even for healthy people. CATS go late to school. A FLOWERPOT sleeps on a balcony. BRATISLAVA is a dirty city. ĽUDMILA Podjavorinská is the godmother of all sparrows. I've got a nice RED APPLE in the window on display. If I see someone I like, I'll gladly give it away.

\*

My neighbor, Kristína, has also driven me. She has a six-year-old girl called Irma. In autumn she is starting school. She is afraid of snow and is afraid of walking on it. But she likes making angels: she lies on her back in the snow and waves her arms up and down. The impression she leaves in the snow is the gift of an angel to me.

Recently she said to me: "Apples have cold cheeks."

In summer, I'm going to teach her to swim.

I have always known it – how to teach children. Half a day, water up to the shoulders.

Together we write a tale about Gigi the fairy. We sit down at the computer, Irma dictates, thinking up all kinds of convoluted sentences. Sometimes she wants to draw; I give her some crayons and pieces of A4, her favourite. Last time she drew me a house with five windows and two mouseholes with door handles for opening and closing. And then she added another door handle specially for me.

She asked for a comb and then did her hair in the mirror.

"Do you like this?" she asked and blew into her locks.

For as long she breathed out, her hair was like a silky curtain over her face. Then she decided she would be my dog, lay down on the carpet and started to scratch her belly.

"Dogs really like that," she said.

When she went for a wee, she suddenly told me that she sometimes likes to have someone standing by the open door near to her: so I stood there.

After finishing her wee, she smiled and said: "Froggy."

That is how I will teach her to swim: just like a froggy.

\*

# Tomáš Forró

## ***Donbass. A Hometown Suite in Hotel War.***

*Tomáš Forró managed to do something no other journalist has: he gained the trust of people on both sides of the war in Ukraine.*

Exceptional reporting, which shows how hybrid wars are conducted in the countries of the former Soviet Union. The fate of the participants and the victims of Russian conflicts in Upper Karabakh and in Georgia are history by now. But in the occupied Donbass, the author discovers that its inhabitants are reliving that history.

The main characters are the Georgian Mamuka, who came to Donbass to fight against Russia, the Czech Jura, who came to fight for Russia, and the Ukrainian woman Líza, who left her beloved Luhansk with her children to get away from the fighting. The book is filled with many other characters, which together create a monumental literary fresco depicting the fall of a civilization.

*“One of the fighters I became friends with on the pro-Russian side used to introduce me to his friends like this: ‘This is Tomáš. He’s our arch enemy, but he’s a good man.’ Everyone kept looking at me, unsure whether to shake my hand.”*



**Tomáš Forró (1979)**

An independent journalist who reports on conflicts and crisis areas all over the world. He has spent the last two years in the war zone of Eastern Ukraine, mostly in the areas controlled by the separatists, and was the only Western journalist there who did not work for the Russian propaganda machine. His articles are regularly published in four additional languages, and he has won several Slovak and Czech journalism prizes for his reporting on contemporary Poland, on the earthquake in Ecuador, and of course, on the Ukrainian conflict.

**Tomáš Forró**  
***Donbas. Svadobný apartmán***  
***v hotelí Vojna***

Published by:  
 N Press, Bratislava 2019, 340 p.

ISBN: 978-80-99925-00-8



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# Donbas

Tomáš Forró

**svadobný apartmán  
— v hoteli Vojna**

Reportáž z ukrajinského konfliktu

## **Russia is teaching Donbass how to fight, but for the time being, only discreetly**

In a hybrid conflict an army is made up of civilians – except for the officers. Those are always real soldiers, faithful, and disciplined.

(...)

A few hours later a civilian vehicle appears on the road. As it passes the parked car from the checkpoint, the signal of the separatists comes through the window. The Ukrainian intelligence unit opens fire. The driver is dead on the spot, but a Russian citizen with an Israeli passport is also found in the car. He has serious injuries, but they manage to interrogate him before he dies. He is in charge of coordinating checkpoints in the area, handing out pay, and giving orders to local units. He identifies himself as an officer of the Russian Armed Forces. They find on him the IDs of all the men who died at the checkpoint that night, a large amount of cash, and munitions for handguns.

Said Russian citizen with an Israeli passport was an army advisor. Their presence is mentioned in dozens of interviews, by Western and Russian journalists, soldiers, and observers. Together with local volunteers and foreign mercenaries, the army advisors complete the mosaic of the armed divisions of Russian hybrid wars. The reporter Górecki describes a meeting with one of them in 1993 in Abkhazia:

“The commander in charge is a Cossack, Anatolyi Sidorenko. ‘A volunteer from Krasnodar 65–is how he introduces himself. (...) My acquaintance is standing in front of the command post with a group of fighters. He’s wearing a T-shirt with blue and white horizontal stripes and an army jacket. (...) Later I found out that Sidorenko was no volunteer, but an elite Russian officer sent to oversee the confederacy forces. Even Russian military instructors fell under his command.”

In Donbass the Russian military advisors are called curators. A hybrid war follows several strict rules, one of which is to operate under the radar – the regular Russian Armed Forces only intervene when it is absolutely necessary, and they never interact with the local units or brigades, such as the Southeastern Army or Vostok. But even though Russia can’t afford direct interference through its soldiers in its secretly conquered colonies, no military operation stands a chance of success without its dedicated and trained officers.

That’s what makes it possible for pro-Russian civilians and soldiers to

# Michal Hvorecký

## **Tahiti**

*What if...? If this question doesn't have a place in historical science, it most certainly does in literature. And in answering it, Michal Hvorecký creates an alternate history of Slovakia and Slovaks, who after World War I live on a distant exotic island, and not in Central Europe.*

The year is 2018, and three generations of Slovaks have been living on Tahiti. They expatriated themselves following an order by General Milan Rastislav Štefánik. In despair over the suffering of his nation in Upper Austria-Hungary, he had been organizing a great migration to Polynesia since 1910. The story is based on historical facts, and works with the well-known literary tropes of "what would have happened if" and "something is different." It is an alternate history of a country, based on several preserved documents.

*“You don’t like life in Austria-Hungary or in America? Are you slaving for someone else for a pittance? Do you want to have a better life, speak your own language, and live freely? We’re building new Slovakia for you on Tahiti! Your children will be able to attend schools and speak in their native tongue. Join us, get land at good prices, and come with us to paradise on Earth!”*



### **Michal Hvorecký (1976)**

A writer, journalist, and translator. Since the 1990s he has been an essential figure of the progressive stream of Slovak literature. He is the author of popular collections of short stories and novels such as *Silný pocit čistoty* (Strong Sense of Cleanliness, 1998), *Dunaj v Amerike* (Danube in America, 2010) and *Wilsonov* (2015). His book *Trol* (Troll, 2017) was published in several languages, and in Germany it became one of the book events of 2018. Hvorecký has also written for children, including *Bratislava. Čarovná metropola* (Bratislava. The Magic Metropolis, 2019), and the text for the comic book about the Velvet Revolution, *Čierna oslava* (A Dark Celebration, 2019). He has translated several literary works from German, including *The Emperor of America* by Martin Pollack, and the graphic novel *Nick Cave* by Reinhard Kleist. Michal Hvorecký is also a regular commentator of current events, and writes about Slovakia for German newspapers and magazines.

Translated titles:

BULGARIAN, CZECH,  
GERMAN, HINDI, SERBIAN:

***Dunaj v Amerike***  
**(Danube in America)**

BULGARIAN, CZECH,  
GERMAN, UKRAINIAN:

***Trol***  
**(Troll)**

CZECH, POLISH:  
***Silný pocit čistoty***  
**(Strong Sense of Cleanliness)**

CZECH:  
***Lovci a zberači***  
**(Hunters and Gatherers)**

GERMAN:  
***City: Der unwahrscheinlichste***  
***aller Orte***  
**(Plush)**

***Eskorta***  
**(Escort)**

ENGLISH, FRENCH:  
***Bratislava. Čarovná metropola***  
**(Bratislava. The Magic Metropolis)**

**Michal Hvorecký**  
***Tahiti***

Published by:  
Marenčin PT, Bratislava 2019, 160 p.

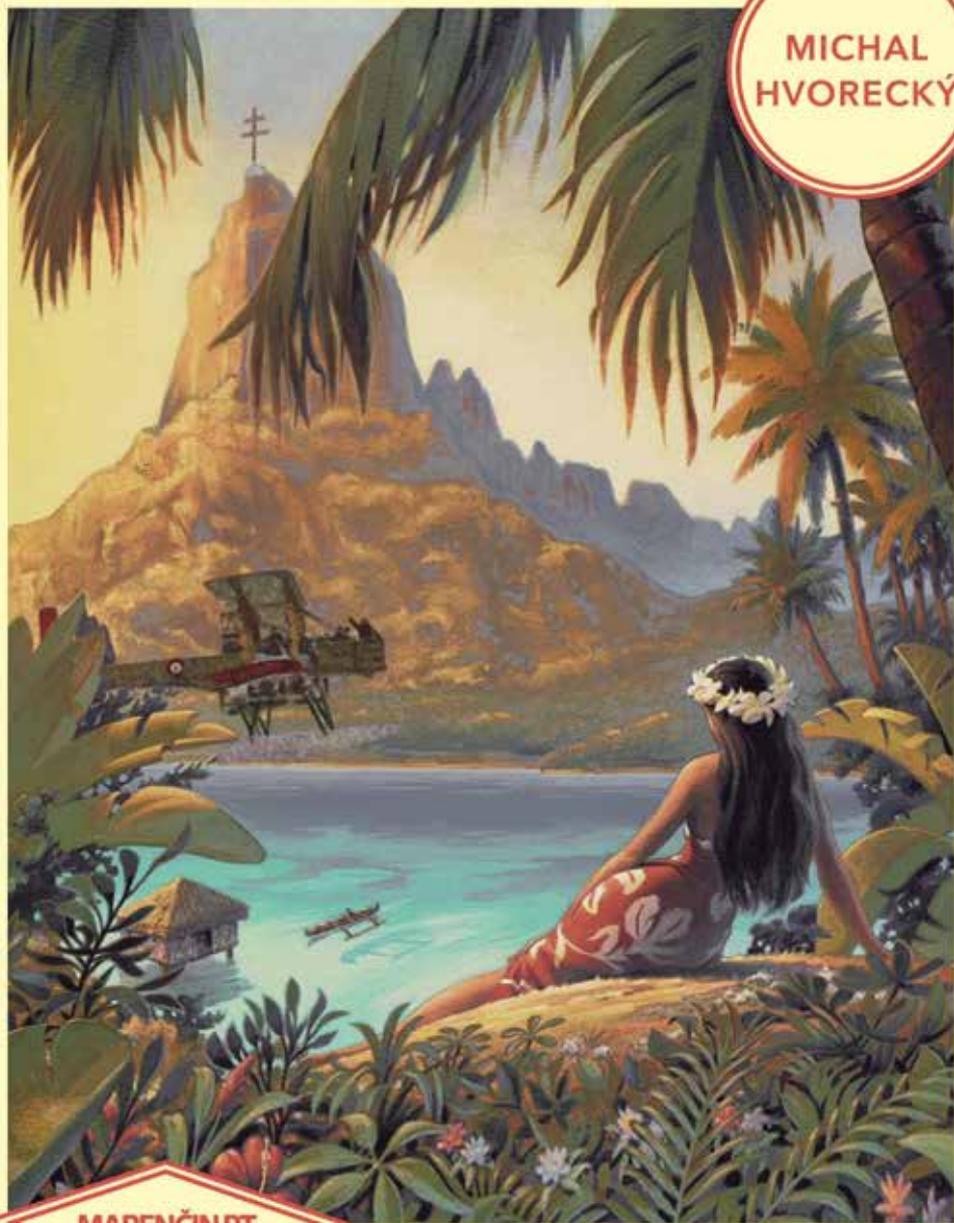
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# TAHITI

MICHAL  
HVORECKÝ



MARENČIN PT

# UTOPIA

The story of the book *Tahiti*, which was burning outside the windows, had started by the monument. Not far from the place where Štefánik died. In 1928 a memorial built to architect Dušan Jurkovič's design was unveiled there. The terraced structure with four tall obelisks was made of travertine blocks. I used to go there often.

Originally Štefánik was supposed to be buried in an honoured spot at the cemetery in Papeete. But the architect persuaded the surviving family as well as public officials to agree to place his grave on higher ground. That made Štefánik all the more exceptional in the symbolic national pantheon. Of all the important Slovaks, only Štefánik rests high up. The funeral procession walked from the bottom to the top, from a valley to a peak.

In spite of the heat, on the day of the unveiling people dressed in traditional costumes, which they hadn't done for some time. Three generations headed up to the monument. Never before had there been such a large gathering of Slovaks. For the first, and in some cases for the last time, people experienced an exhilarating sense of unity and fellowship, brought on by the memory of his tragic death. The black mourning décor implied that the national hero-liberator deserved the same honoured as late kings.

By then old customs were blending with local ones, so Slovaks brought sacrificial presents to please Oro, the god of war. From time immemorial the Tahitian dead had rested on Mount Temehani, which was always covered by a white cloud, because the dead disliked sunshine and light.

Polynesian tattoo art had become popular among the Slovaks. After the tragic hurricane, men, but to some extent also women, tattooed motifs of their old homeland onto their skin. Everyone was trying to deal with homesickness in his own way.

Men older than twelve covered their whole bodies with pictures, including their faces and tongues. Women usually only tattooed their shoulders, the upper part of their backs, their arms, and the corners of their mouths. As a result, one could tell at first glance who was from which region. Frequently, if two people were arguing and wanted to show how different they were, they stuck their tongues out at each other, or thrust their arms toward each other, bearing the characteristic picture of their birthplace. Out of grief the Slovaks also cut their foreheads with knives made of shark teeth, as the locals had taught them.

By the grave of the General, whom even the winners of the Great War venerated, they had gained a new self-awareness, and they started to believe in their own strength.

# Andrej Bán

## ***An Elephant in Zemplín***

*A thirty-year journey of discovery across Slovakia finishes in 2018 shortly after the murder of the Slovak investigative journalist, Ján Kuciak.*

Having journeyed many times from east to west, from the Ukrainian border to Bratislava, the reporter and photographer, Andrej Bán, knows Slovakia as well as anyone. For thirty years he has been travelling its major and minor roads getting to know its people and their stories. The book *An Elephant in Zemplín* is an intimate picture of the country and people living their lives in villages and small towns far from Slovakia's major hubs of activity. And at the end of this story we read about the murder of a Slovak journalist and about the 'Ndrangheta' Italian mafia. This is powerful testimony from a country which even its own inhabitants do not properly know. In Slovakia the book has achieved huge success with readers.

*“Experiences of war have taught me that not even under Mečiar or Fico, nor even when Kotleba was marching through squares in his guardist uniform, have things in Slovakia been as bad as in the Balkans under Milošević or in Ukraine with Putin as Russian president. But at the same time, it is clear that unless we keep a grip on things properly and in good time, our society can quickly become radicalized.”*

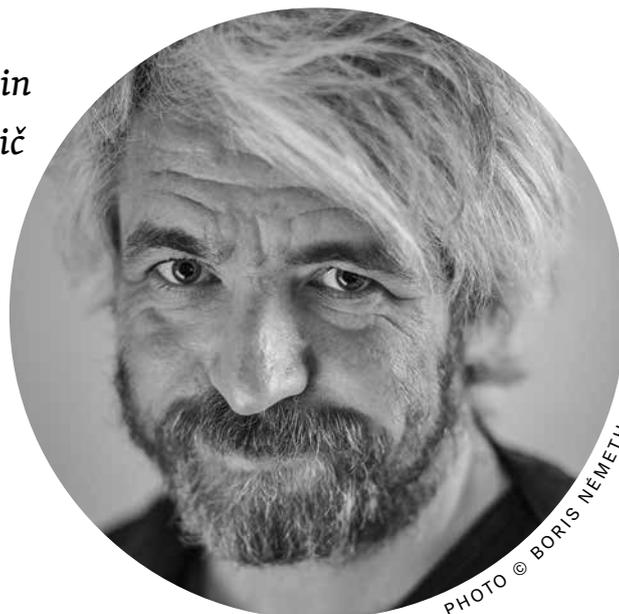


PHOTO © BORIS NEMETH

### **Andrej Bán (1964)**

A photographer and reporter for the Denník N newspaper, studied Economics and Journalism in Bratislava. Since 1987, he has been working for both Slovak and foreign media, primarily sending reports from hard-hit parts of the world such as Kosovo, Israel, Georgia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ukraine and Haiti, which he often goes back to. He likes to take a deeper look at the causes of conflicts as well as at the difficult situation of victims of war and natural catastrophes over a long period, as they struggle to return to normality. This experience led, for instance, to his collection of photographs and articles published as *Žijeme horšie ako mŕtvi* (We Live Worse than the Dead) about Georgian refugees from Abkhazia. In 1999, during the war in Kosovo, he founded and then ran for thirteen years the *People in Need* organization. His other publications include the photobooks *Iné Slovensko* (The Other Slovakia, 2005) and *Kosovo* (2008), as well as the photo-documentary book *Na juh od raja* (South of Eden, 2016), covering the twenty-five countries he has reported from since 1991. With the same enthusiasm with which he documents events in warzones, he has also been patiently and thoroughly mapping events in Slovakia. Andrej Bán is the coauthor of documentary films, has had around fifty exhibitions in Slovakia and abroad and has won several awards such as the *Journalist's Prize*, *Picture of the Year*, *Crystal Wing*, *White Crow Award* and *Gypsy Spirit*.

Translated titles:

ENGLISH :

***Iné Slovensko***  
**(The other Slovakia)**

***Kosovo***  
**(Kosovo)**

***Na juh od raja***  
**(South of Eden)**

**Andrej Bán**  
***Slon na Zemplíne***

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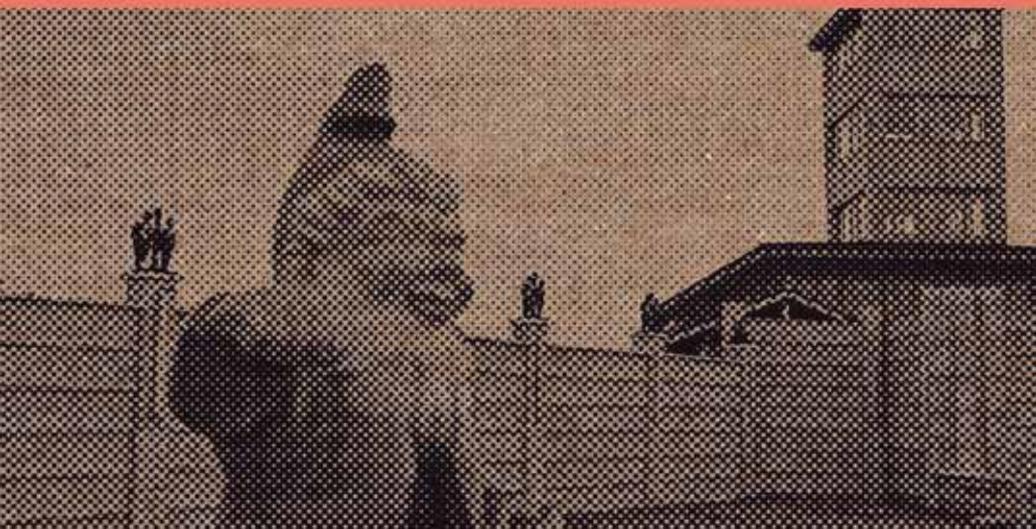
# Slon na Zemplíne

Príbehy Slovenska

Andrej Bán

**„Svadbu sme tu nemali  
už najmenej desať rokov,  
no ak počkáte, bude asi  
pohreb.“**

absynt  
prekliati / reportéri



Marek, around forty, is in advertising, the publisher of a regional classified ads paper. He has been grappling with the foul practices of the locals linked to the ruling party Smer that allow them to enjoy (in a democracy!) privileges unimaginable for others. Not just in a single case, but in a dozen or fifty... Scores of people have risen to power in this way around here. It's driving Marek crazy. Without hesitation, he attends every protest he can. He travels to Bratislava with his drum to demand the sacking of the corrupt hockey association president, then again he doesn't skimp on petrol for the thousand-kilometre drive to the capital to have a good shout outside Bonaparte, a residential complex where Prime Minister Robert Fico lives. A remarkable determination in face of a seemingly immovable reality. And behind his determination there is the hidden belief, full of barely concealed disappointment and anger, at Bratislava's café intellectuals, who he suspects would find even historical figures such as Štúr and Štefánik lacking (let alone present-day opposition politicians Sulík and Matovič), and who just can't get their heads round the fact that they have to stop brooding and go out into the streets. Because Slovakia needs them.

Thieves, as far as the eye can see, nothing but thieves! This is the monotone world according to Marek, the single word that comprises his gospel. An overused term guaranteed to grate with you after a while. But you can't stop asking yourself if, in view of what is happening all around us, it may not after all be justified. If you set aside the theatricals and a certain revolutionary zeal, you have to admit that Marek's friend Michal, a journalist from out east in Michalovce, has a point when he speaks of Smer as a well-organised army. There in the East, under the current government led by the left-wing party whose representatives are, ironically, mostly businessmen, including some major ones, town assets are being sold off on a scale unseen since the fall of communism. We are talking land, historic buildings, even a part of the winter sports stadium. Local MPs for Smer, mostly doctors with an army of faithful patients who vote for them, have seized total control of the place. People are too scared to speak up or voice any criticism. This is a sad fact – thirty years after the end of the totalitarian regime. The dominant party has paralysed its opponents hereabouts, or it has co-opted them, or removed them from office. Three options, one worse than the next. It all sounds pretty hopeless.

But then, in February 2018, the journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová are assassinated. The event shakes up society. Initially the arrogant and until then cocksure Smer fails to understand and refuses to believe what is happening, but hitherto suppressed anger begins to explode all over the country. The formerly fearless, well-organised army panics and starts looking for relatively acceptable paths of retreat.

Nearly all the media print the last, unfinished, article by the slain young journalist, which he had been working on for months. It focuses on the country's east. The Zemplín region is home to Italians linked to the 'Ndrangheta' branch of the Mafia as well as to Smer. Jesus, what kind of country are we living in? – people write to each other in text messages.

I return to Michalovce a week after the murder of the two young people. Just like back in January 1990, it is freezing cold. Darkness, frost, deep snow. I ask Marek to organise a meeting with two or three people who have some information on the suspect Italians and their wheeling-dealing. As discreetly as possible, without any fuss. It's best to play safe and try not to provoke a snake with one's bare foot, especially since we don't know when and how it might attack. I park the car and look around to check whether I'm being followed. Wordlessly, two friends of Marek, members of the Zemplín Civic Initiative accompany me to a bar in the town. The *Free DOM* bar is ready, chairs for three dozen people face a table with a microphone. I look at Marek with silent reproach, wondering what this is supposed to be.

"Well, a discussion... With you," he laughs. I protest, it was meant to be the other way around. I was the one supposed to ask the questions and the locals were supposed to answer. "There'll be time for that," he says, waving his hand dismissively.

The place begins to fill up gradually. Over a dozen people have come, interested in hearing what I have to say. An elderly man pipes up from a corner: he's clearly the worse for drink. He says his name is Miro. "I might know a thing or two about the Italians but I'm not going to talk about it. The firm they have in Močerany, where I'm from, has burned down," he says with an air of mystery. A woman joins in, without introducing herself: "The Italians? We barely knew they were here until now. They have kept themselves to themselves." Another man concurs, adding that the Italians live a life of their own, people don't know much about it around here. The first time the locals took any notice of one of

their number, Diego, an older guy, was when his Ferrari careered through town at breakneck speed. It all sounds like scenes from a bad B-movie. No, I don't want to hear that, I tell myself. These people seem to have banded together to give me a distorted picture of the reality. Surely things can't be this grotesque? But I do know that paranoia and conspiracies are effective methods of self-defence. Particularly now that these people have suddenly thrown off the burden of fear that's been nourished for so many years. For them the sympathetic ear that has come to hear them out is the saviour of their tormented souls. I spend two hours being a nodding dog. Sometimes I look to the left, sometimes to the right, listening patiently to grievances and complaints about the injustices that these people have suffered for generations and that have been tolerated, or even ignored, by the state and the police. No, what I am witnessing here is not a return to communism. What is being exposed and laid bare here in its purest form is feudalism. I feel like a figure in a painting from the nineteenth century. Or, rather, the seventeenth.

In February 2018, following the murder of the journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová, Slovakia made headlines around the world and Slovak society underwent a huge change. As confidence in justice was shaken and links between the Mafia and the country's top officials were exposed, people took to the streets in mass protests, calling for a return to decency. Although Slovakia is almost invisible on the map of Europe, it became clear that the way this country functions echoes developments throughout Central Europe. The events occurred just as reporter Andrej Bán was in the middle of writing his book about Slovakia, *An Elephant in Zemplín*, and quite naturally have taken centre stage.

# Ivan Medeši

## ***Eating***

*A punky literary experience for connoisseurs. Expect to be disgusted!*

A Slovak village beyond the boundaries of Slovakia—six stories sometimes beyond the boundaries of decorum and good taste, or at least so-called decorum. The setting of Medeši's stories is Ruski Kerestur, a village built in the Serbian region of Vojvodina as an enclave of Ruthenians who two hundred years ago left East Slovakia for a better life. The writer Ivan Medeši is one of their descendants and the livelihood and reality of the life of his contemporaries living in Vojvodina is his major theme: the alcoholic Mire, who loses his limbs because of his drinking; Žermina the drug addict struggling desperately for another dose of heroin; the neighbour who goes so crazy from watching public television, he secretly leads cows out of barns and puts them in other people's living rooms at the same time as rearranging

all their furniture; Petrik, an ex-alcoholic thirty-something so provoked by the permanently drunk down-and-outs under his window he ends up killing one of them; an ex-teacher tackling his midlife crisis with perverse ideas of sex with various women from the village and masturbating in front of their windows; Krištof, a fat boy with apparently no hope of having a better future. In the eternal struggle between body and soul, it is the body which wins in Medeši's work. Base physicality, captured in the artistic design of the book, permeates all its narrative layers – the soul is a very poor opponent to the body. Cleverly and humorously combining two contrasting linguistic levels, the vulgar and the intellectual, the author gives his work an unmistakably grotesque quality.

*“Around me are people who in some strange way exude pure poetry and tempt me to put them into my work. Several of them are in this book. Sometimes I mix myself up with such people and try to show what would happen if I was in their shoes – and fantasize about how badly things might turn out.”*



### **Ivan Medeši (1982)**

The literary enfant terrible of the Ruthenians, one of the numerous national minorities in Serbia's Vojvodina, he is associated by name to the Rusyns, by national myth to the Ukrainians and by language to the Eastern Slovaks. He grew up in the main home of the diaspora, in the village of Ruski Kerestur, where after university study in Novy Sad he still lives. He started publishing at the start of the century in the punk zine *Keresturski pendrek*. As coauthor of the 2006 poetry collection *Trilogija*, he won the A. Duchnovič prize for Ruthenian literature. In 2007 his short story collection *Chtoška od mňa dvoch ňenormalni* was published; this was followed in 2011 by his generational novel *Špaciri po spodku dunca*. A selection of his satirical poems, feuilletons and articles was published in Slovakia in 2010 with the title *Kvašna kňižka*.

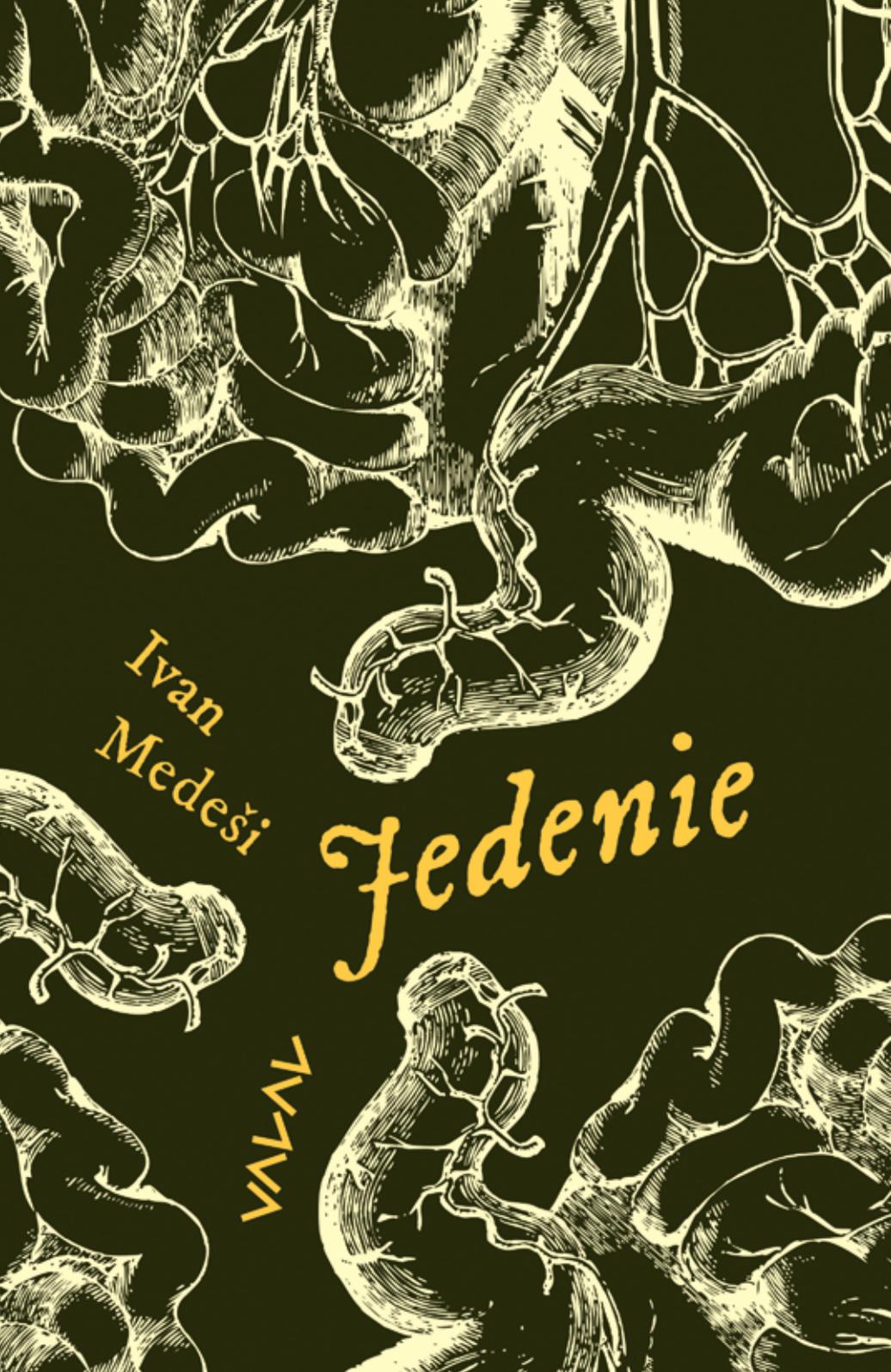
### **Ivan Medeši** **Jedenie**

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VALAL, Malčice 2018, 224 p.

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Ivan  
Medeši

# Jedenie

77777

It was about four in the afternoon and either time for doing stuff or for a siesta. There was hardly anyone out and a feeling of lethargy was in the air – you could almost feel it as much as feel the death of hope in the corridor of the job centre. Capundrek was again heading out into the fields. He went past all the houses and soon had stubbly cornfields on either side. He got off the bike seat and continued on foot through the field, pushing his bike. If anyone had been watching him from the edge of the field in the way he had been watching others just before, they would have seen a person with dubious intentions looking out from behind the corn, then suddenly disappearing, then peeping out again but in a completely different direction. A weirdo. What the hell was he up to?

He arrived at the place he was looking for, the one he had deliberately chosen. He hopped over the tumbledown fence, opened the gates, went round the back and in through the unlocked door. Oh the crisis, the crisis!! What had it done to old Capundrek? Had he nothing to eat that he had to steal from the mouths of strangers to feed himself? No – it wasn't that! He had other fish to fry...

First the television was switched on to one of the public channels. It was turned down low but Capundrek could hear everything. What next? With no-one at home, any old weirdo could just wander in and make himself at home. What was he up to? Well first he took the tablecloth off the kitchen table, found another one of a different colour, laid that down in its place and put the first one back in the cupboard. Then he carried the table out and put it down in the middle of the living room. He put the living-room table in the bedroom – there was room for it there – and he also changed the tablecloth. He moved the bedside locker to the bathroom, put it right in the middle – so that they could see it! Then he carried the small couch from the living room into the children's room and the bed from the children's room into the living room. He dragged the kitchen table into the living room right up to the wall, where the couch had been, left the children's bed in the middle and pushed the big couch next to it. Then he put all the dining-table chairs by the wall where the big couch had been. He moved all the bedroom wardrobes, putting two by the wall opposite and leaving one in the middle of the room. Capundrek then decided to take the tablecloth which hung down beneath the telly at Christmas and put it on the toilet seat. He rolled up the carpet from the children's room and put it in the kitchen, then took the carpet from the kitchen and put it in the hall. Once he had done all that, he still had time for his main task. He went into the barn, untied one of the cows and led her into the living room.

# Vanda Rozenbergová

## ***Three Deaths are Sailing***

*I was almost thirty-three  
and the pain I'd been  
trying to avoid for so  
long was at its worst.*

Karola, a thirty-four-year-old Roma woman, tells us her story, about how, as an eight-year old, she was adopted by a married couple who soon after had a son, Oskar. Karola grows up and falls in love with Mikuláš, a married man. Then her stepbrother dies, an event which slowly turns Karola's parents into alcoholics. Karola finds Oskar's diary containing descriptions of journeys he has dreamt – astral travelling which may have taken him to other worlds forever. But why does Karola tell us all this? She has brought painful experiences from her first family with her and has come to terms with them. But has she really? After tragedies which appear not to have affected her, she undergoes a catharsis. But it is not one without sacrifices or gifts and in the end Karola gives birth to Mikuláš's child.

*“I’m not the kind of person who gets very attached to places or to things and my children are growing up with the same attitude. Their home is where I am and mine is where I have my shoes.”*



**Vanda Rozenbergová (1971)**

Writer, painter and bibliographer, she studied Journalism and has since had a variety of different occupations. She is a three-time finalist in the Povedka competition (2001, 2005 and 2006) and in her writing is especially convincing in her treatment of personal relationships. Thanks to her excellent powers of observation and attention to detail, her characters are never flat nor her stories superficial. Both with the short story collection *Slobodu bažantom* (Freedom for Pheasants, 2015) and the novel *Muž z jamy, deti z lásky* (Man out of Pit, Children out of Love, 2017) she reached the final of the Anasoft Litera Award. In 2018, her latest, third novel *Tri smrtky sa plavia* (Three Deaths are Sailing, 2018) was published and was again an Anasoft Litera finalist. Vanda Rozenbergová is a woman of many dimensions. As well as being an excellent writer, she likes to draw (she illustrated the covers of her last three books) and organize summer camps for children from poor families and children’s homes. And it was a little girl from one of these camps who served as inspiration to her for the character of Karola.

**Vanda Rozenbergová**  
***Tri smrtky sa plavia***

Published by:  
Slovart, Bratislava 2018, 160 p.

ISBN: 978-80-556-3568-2



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Vanda Rozenbergová  
TRI SMRTKY  
SA PLAVIA



He died three years ago, on April 27<sup>th</sup> 2015. It was cardiac arrest – yes, so young, I know. I spoke to him quite loudly but didn't scream. I held his cold cheeks and his skin was softer than ever before. I could tell because I often used to rub him with zinc oil and he would act as if it tickled him. I kissed each of his eyes. His telephone was on the floor – he used it as an alarm clock. I quickly called an ambulance and told them my brother was dead and asked them to hurry, dictating to them our address. I was the first to arrive home and find him; my mother came at the same time as the ambulance and I could do nothing to stop her seeing his long, dead eyelashes. Mum worked as a hairdresser and arrived home after six. Dad has had the morning shift and should have been home but wasn't. We rotate shifts at the florist shop and that day I had finished at two. In the kitchen I had taken out a frying pan and poured a little oil into it. Then I had washed my hands and replaced the handtowel with a clean one. I cracked open two eggs and added them to the oil, turning down the heat. Then I walked up the seven stairs to where Oskar and I have our bedrooms. I had noticed that Oskar's shoes and bag were still downstairs so realized he must still be at home....

He was there. He hadn't left for work. He lay in bed. Both the pillowcases and sheet were white and unpatterned.

His delicate face, short hair, eyebrows, little goatee beard – his whole expression created a sense of genuine peace in the room. He was very mature, intelligent and responsible for his age. He had broad shoulders and a birthmark in the middle of his sternum. Father embraced him around the shoulders and breathed in the scent which lingered on his son's skin and hair. We all refused a sedative injection, wiped up the water spilled from his glass. We must have said a hundred times how the postmortem would explain everything; Grandad was the first to say it wouldn't explain anything. Then, at the end of that bizarre day, even though we would never have called him even if the place had been on fire, the neighbour came round. His angular figure filled the whole kitchen door frame. Neither that day nor the ones that followed did we understand anything nor even wonder what could have led Norwegian to enter our closed circle – probably just a lack of intelligence of the most basic kind, that, for example, which a person needs to find food or a place to sleep for the night.

"I'm coming straight from the hospital. I've had an operation on my metatarsals," said Norwegian standing at the door and I would have helped him with his crutches if he had had any. "If you need anything, just give me a call..." Fine. He could have left it for a year or two. We wouldn't be needing anything.

# Marek Vadas

## ***A Bad Neighbourhood***

*Where can you hear the most incredible stories from all over Africa? In a suburban bar, of course.*

A forgotten bar on the outskirts of a tropical metropolis awaits an apocalypse. It's time for a recap, and the journey into the past is as unknown, mysterious, and dangerous as the anticipated end. The narrator knows about everything, except his own life, and he himself has no idea which of the stories are his own, and which he had heard somewhere. Reality, desires, and bad dreams come together in an unusual mosaic of texts, full of irony as well as the magic of Africa.

*“On a number of occasions I have witnessed events which fall outside our conventional understanding, and I couldn’t come up with a rational explanation for them. For example, in meeting sorcerers I ran across many con men, but I also had shivers run down my spine from anxiety and amazement, which convinced me that there are still things to be explored. And that our civilization would be better served by less arrogance and more respect for the unknown.”*



**Marek Vadas (1971)**

Marek Vadas brings together traditional African storytelling and darker existential stories that come out of the European cultural tradition. During his numerous trips to Cameroon he learned about the local culture, and became an advisor to the king of the small kingdom of Nyenjei. In his mysterious short stories, Africa is present as the backdrop against which reality intertwines with fantasy, the living with the dead, and the profane with the sacred. His stories are filled with irony, dark humour, and absurdity. The reader crosses a boundary beyond which the fantastic is completely natural, matter-of-fact, and quotidian, similar to fairy tales and myths. Vadas has won the Literary Fund Prize in 1994 for his *Malý román* (A Short Novel, 1993), the Bibiana Prize for the best children’s book of the year in 2004 for his *Rozprávky z čiernej Afriky* (Stories from Dark Africa, 2003), and the most prestigious award for prose in Slovakia, the Anasoft Litera Prize, in 2007 for his collection of short stories *Liečiteľ* (The Healer, 2006). His children’s book *Útek* (The Escape, 2016), illustrated by Daniela Olejníková, won the Golden Apple Award at the Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava in 2017, and has been translated into many languages.

Translated titles:

BULGARIAN, CZECH,  
HUNGARIAN, POLISH, UKRAINIAN:

***Liečiteľ***  
**(The Healer)**

CHINESE, CZECH, ENGLISH,  
KOREAN, SLOVINIAN, SPANISH:

***Útek***  
**(The Escape)**

**Marek Vadas**  
***Zlá štvrť***

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ZLÁ  
ŠTVRT

M. VADAS

## Why We Booze

You stop in the middle of the street, look around, and what do you see? Everyone's drinking. Naturally, I booze too, I won't deny it, but it's different with me. I battle demons. I devote all of my time to this struggle; often I'm even battling them in my sleep. It's because there are two more of me in my head, two more Mbomas, and a number of minor, but dangerous, characters that argue with me and make me anxious. Which is why I have to drink regularly. The characters settle down after a few bottles of palm wine.

I wonder why everyone else boozes. It's a mystery, because at first glance, an outsider wouldn't get the impression that we're lacking anything. OK, the streets are in disrepair and there's sewage in front of the houses, but that's no reason to keep killing yourself with alcohol.

Take a look – that one over there is on his eighth beer, so he isn't poor. We have everything we need; no one's dying of hunger, the food stands are always packed. Maybe life's just too long and we're bored with it. Those warm days that are always the same...

Walk from here, the Touch of Class bar, to the train station right before midnight – you'll have to push your way through a crowd, and you won't meet a single person with his wits about him. All of them will be laughing hysterically, shouting, pummeling each other, or otherwise, collapsed in a ditch. You'll find people slumped over benches, on unattended sales counters, and who knows why, also on corrugated metal roofs; last night I even saw someone snoozing in a treetop. In the wee hours of the morning some are still sprawled out in parks or under the facades of unfinished houses. Arms spread wide, as if they didn't belong to them, legs splayed out, and occasionally a cock sticking out of their pants. Such a sleeper looks like a dog that had rolled onto its back to get scratches. It's a sign of trust; the dog isn't afraid to show its groin, it trusts you, its owner, that you won't hurt it. The sleeper is just as relaxed and carefree, the streets of Akwa are his owner, who feeds him and whom he trusts.

By midmorning they're sitting on the porch, bleary-eyed, guzzling beer. Their heads hurt, but in that moment no one would expect anything else. One man is boozing because he has lost his job, another is celebrating having just gotten one, and a third that he never had one.

# Pavel Vilikovský

## ***The Thrill is Gone***

*Mellow blues about searching for the lost paradise of youth.*

Reading Vilikovský's latest book is like flipping through an old photo album, out of which emerge yellowed photographs of parents, a grandmother, friends, and last but not least, of Prague streets. Despite the fact that the title evokes an image of a writer evaluating what he had lived through, that is only partly true. The work is more of a mosaic of characters and sketches of their seemingly ordinary stories, connected by the perspective of a brilliant observer, and the belief that nostalgia can be unsentimental and memory can be painless.

*“Here’s the thing about writing: I write through me, but not about me. I’m only the sensitive photographic emulsion onto which light imprints an image. Let the reader keep guessing – my opinion is not important; in the end, it’s all about the conclusion he reaches.”*

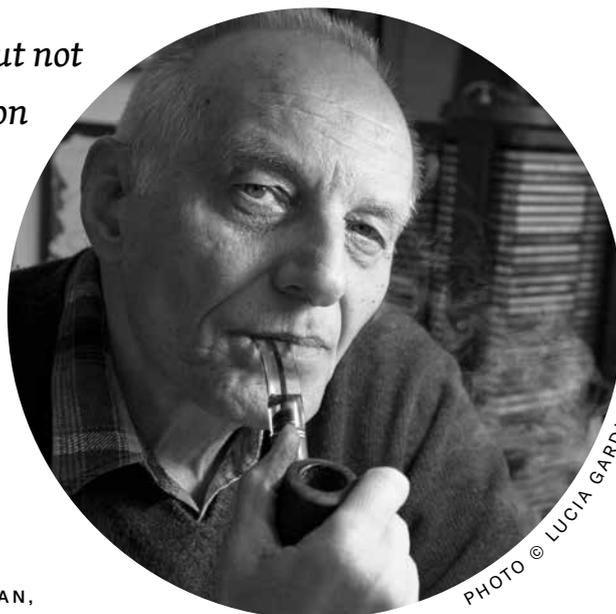


PHOTO © LUCIA GARDIN + LIC

### **Pavel Vilikovský (1941)**

Pavel Vilikovský is one of the most expressive voices of contemporary Slovak literature on the domestic as well as on the international literary scene. He belongs to the strong generation of writers which emerged in the 1960s, and fundamentally changed the face of Slovak fiction. His works are considered modern classics, and he is the only writer to have been awarded the most prestigious Slovak award for fiction, the Anasoft Litera Award, twice. Vilikovský’s most popular titles such as *Vlastný životopis zla* (The Autobiography of Evil, 2009), *Pes na ceste* (Dog on a Road, 2010) and *Letmý sneh* (Fleeting Snow, 2014) all share a poignant irony, typical Central European melancholy, and most importantly, brilliant, clear, and dangerously precise language. This is corroborated by another famous figure of Slovak literature, Tomáš Janovic, who, speaking about Vilikovský’s writing, has said that the more simply a deep thought is expressed, the deeper it is.

Translated titles:

AMHARIC, ENGLISH,  
FRENCH, ITALIAN, NORWEGIAN,  
POLISH, ROMANIAN:

***Večne je zelený...* (Ever Green is ...)**

ARABIC, ENGLISH, FRENCH:  
***Letmý sneh* (Fleeting Snow)**

ARABIC, MACEDONIAN,  
POLISH, SERBIAN:  
***Krutý strojvodca*  
(The Cruel Engine Driver)**

BULGARIAN, FRENCH, ITALIAN:  
***Kôň na poschodí, slepec vo Vrábľoch*  
(A Horse Upstairs, A Blind  
Man in Vrable)**

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

CZECH, CROATIAN, FRENCH:  
***Pes na ceste* (Dog on a Road)**

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

FRENCH, HUNGARIAN:  
***Vlastný životopis zla*  
(The Autobiography of Evil)**

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

HUNGARIAN:  
***Prvá a posledná láska*  
(The First and Last Love)**

ITALIAN:  
***Slovenský Casanova*  
(A Slovak Casanova)**

**Pavel Vilikovský**  
***RAJc je preč***

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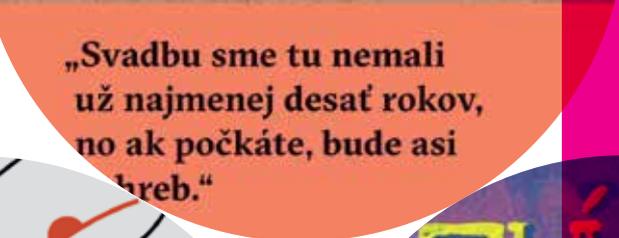
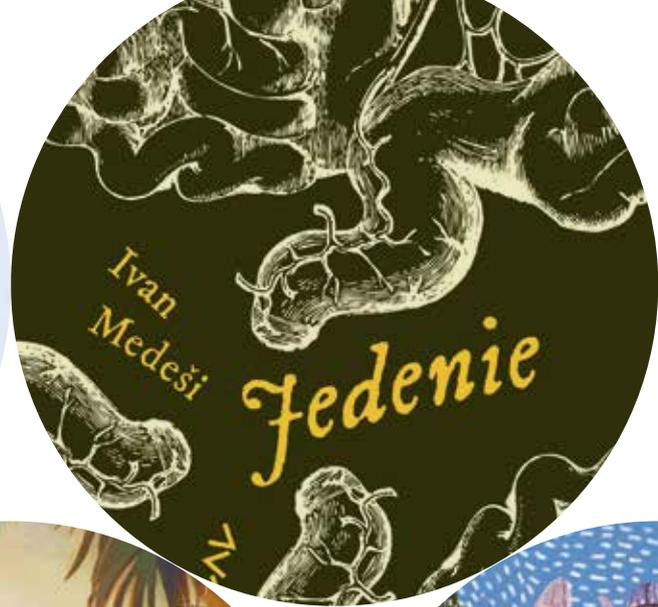
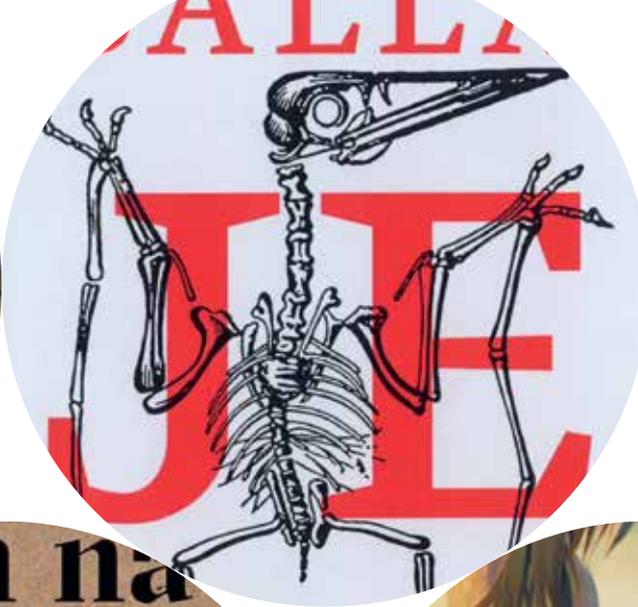


It's a matter of getting through an ordinary day. For example, it could be a matter of buying bread. Let's not set any obstacles in our path; the store is nearby. It's right around the corner; it's a summer evening with a light breeze, a neighbour in front of our building is wearing shorts. The store is nearby, it's large and empty, there's plenty of bread on the shelves. It's still a matter of buying bread.

We could, for instance, put together a list of small pleasures. We could look forward to today's newspaper, to a cigarette with the neighbour, to the crackling of the warm crust in the paper bag, to walking by the liquor counter, where we could feast our eyes on the bright labels of the bottles, or on the flowery scarf the store clerk uses to tie up her hair. For a brief moment we could imagine she's our wife, and bask in the idea. Outside the store the sun is shining, and when we lean forward, we catch a glimpse of a castle in the hazy hot air. We could even pretend that we went up to the castle – it's a nice view, worth the walk – and we just happen to be buying bread. Along the way. We could tell ourselves that, we could even believe it. Of course, that doesn't change the fact that this whole time it's still a matter of buying bread.

It's demeaning. If it only affected us, we could act freely, turn around, and go hungry. We'd survive. We could, though that's a different matter, buy a sandwich on the way to the theatre. Without giving it any thought. Eat it then and there. But that's a different matter. There's a vegetable stew for dinner, and the wife has to pick up the child from preschool. The tasks have been divided. After that it's a matter of buying bread. Let's not talk about the poor sod who has to go all over town looking for white bread from Čalovec. Let's not say that it's raining, the store is closed, and the other store has a long line at the checkout. Let's not say that the bread hasn't been delivered yet, that they only have yesterday's bread. The store is nearby, it's open, large and empty, the shopping basket is right there. It's still a matter of buying bread.

It's a matter of looking at our watch and saying: My God, it's already four-thirty! Why God? Why already? It's a matter of life and death. We weren't counting on that.



**Literárne informačné centrum**  
**Centre for Information on Literature**  
 Nám. SNP 12  
 812 24 Bratislava  
 Slovak Republic  
 Email: lic@litcentrum.sk

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**Contact:**  
[booksfromslovakia@litcentrum.sk](mailto:booksfromslovakia@litcentrum.sk)  
 „Svadbu sme tu nemali už najmenej desať rokov, no ak počkáte, bude asi hreb.“