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MÁRIA FERENČUHOVÁ IN LONDON AND BRIGHTON

Poetess Mária Ferenčuhová attended the Maintenan Camarade event, which has been successfully organized for the third time by the English poet and cultural activist Steven Fowler. Ferenčuhová made her presentation together with British poetess Frances Kruk and nine other pairs of poets on 7th July in the Rich Mix Centre in London.

THIRD INTERNATIONAL POETRY TRANSLATION WORKSHOP IN SLOVAKIA

In July eight poets from all over the world spent a week in the beautiful Smolenice Castle, working on translations of their poetry, using English as the bridge language. Among the participants were the foremost Catalan poet Hilari de Cara, "living legend" Vishnu Khare from India, the outstanding Irish poet and haikuist Gabriel Rosenstock, the temperamental Tiziana Colusso from Italy, from Azerbaijan, Alina Talybova, a poet who has written from childhood, the charming Eva Luka from Slovakia, and the youngest participant, post-graduate student of philosophy from Latvia, Artis Ostups. The workshop was supervised by the excellent Scottish poet, Tom Pow. The workshop was organised by LIC in cooperation with Literature across Frontiers.



Tom Pow and Eva Luka at the collective presentation on 13 July in Artoteka.

Photo © Pavel Kastl

HVIEZDOSLAV PRIZE FOR ZDENKA VALENT-BELIĆ

The 2012 Pavol Orságh Hviezdoslav Prize was awarded to the Serbian translator Zdenka Valent-Belić. She received the prize at the Centre for Information on Literature (LIC) during the literary seminar on translations of Slovak books. Being the author of books for adults and children herself, Valent-Belić has also translated from Slovak for more than 12 years. She has already translated 18 books of Slovak authors for Serbian readers, most of which has been published thanks to the financial support of the LIC SLOLIA COMMISSION.



Zdenka Valent-Belić

Photo © Archive of LIC

MILA HAUGOVÁ IN SLOVENIA

The Slovenian literary festival, organized by Stanislava Repar and Primož Repar from Kud Apokalipsa, took place in September in Ljubljana, Škocjan, Sežan, and Terst. Slovakia was represented by poetess Mila Haugová, whose poems were read in Slovak, Slovenian and Italian.



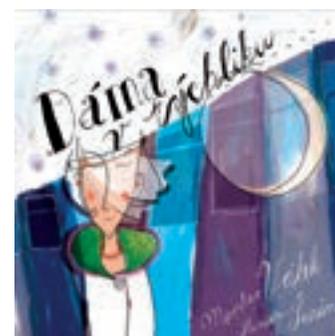
Ambassador of Slovak Republic to Slovenia Marianna Oravcová, Mila Haugová and Stanislava Repar.
Photo © Author's Archive

LADY IN THE HIGH-SPEED TRAIN IN BERLIN

Lady in the High-speed Train was the title of a musical/literary event held at the Slovak Institute (SI) in Berlin on 20th September.

The event took place as commemoration of the 85th anniversary of the late Slovak poet Miroslav Válek. The programme was

opened by the director of the SI in Berlin, Martin Sarvaš, who introduced the public to the life and work of Miroslav Válek – a poet, writer for children and adults, translator and essayist. The current literary scene in Slovakia was introduced by Daniela Humajová. The programme was enriched by the musical performance of Stanislav Šurín, who set several of Válek's poems to music.



From left: Daniela Humajová, Martin Sarvaš, Stanislav Šurín

Photo © Ema Bleyová

MONIKA KOMPANÍKOVÁ IN VIENNA

This Literary night on the 1st of October 2012 gave readers of poetry the chance to attend special events. In several Vienna cafes authors read poems while the readers enjoyed good coffee, as befitted world coffee day! In café Prückel, Slovak author, Monika Kompaníková, presented extracts of her newest short story, *Escape*, with strong café motifs, written for this special occasion.

Lubica Kepštová

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND ITS EFFORTS TO PRESERVE HUMAN KINDNESS AND UNDERSTANDING

In recent times contemporary Slovak literature for children and young people has registered marked changes that are evidence of an increasing penetration into the inner world of today's child, as regards his or her authentic experience and reflection of the outside world. Authors are more and more often depicting the extreme behaviour of children nowadays, who are seen as uncontrollable, inconsiderate and aggressive, as if we had forgotten that it is we ourselves who rear them, together with the anonymous chaotic world we have prepared for them.

It is as if authors are afraid at first to define today's children, who became for a certain time elusive and nameless entities, as can be seen from the current genres that have dealt with them indirectly. The escape into tales of fantasy, into a world of witches and wizards in which children, their dreams, imaginings and secret wishes have cautiously moved, have become one of the most common features of contemporary children's literature both in our country and in the world as a whole.

Threats to the natural functioning of the world and the arrival of a new generation of children, who are coming into the world equipped in a completely different way and with non-standard behaviour, have become the theme of contemplative, meditative stories, such as those offered by **Erik Jakub Groch** in his little book for indigo children *Ábé, Aha a spol.* (ABC, Aha et Al.).

In the field of literature that lies somewhere between the world of children and that of adults, new works have begun to appear by progressive authors and illustrators; works about cruelty and extreme human relations involving people on the fringes of society, such as the prose work by **Slávka Liptáková** *Chlapec bez mena* (The Boy Without a Name), or *Píšťalkár* (The Piper), by Erik Jakub Groch.

Changes in the range of genres of contemporary literature for children and young people point to a turning away from the dominant world of fantasy to a more realistic sphere. While themes involving wizards give their heroes supernatural powers that helped them to solve the problems of everyday life, social prose intuitively penetrates the inner life of its heroes and the problems that influence their childhoods, the formation of their characters,

temperament and acceptance by society. In literary practice this means a change towards problematic social groups of children frowned on by society. This fresh view by authors reveals the minds of children who contradict and insult their polite parents, teachers and others looking after them, and it points towards the well-masked and sophisticatedly-refined factors that trigger a child's asocial behaviour, such as hypocrisy, unawareness and devastation of the fragile human spirit, disregard for its natural needs – love, security and truthfulness about life.

The trend in contemporary social prose for boys is represented by **Roman Brat**, who focuses on an intellectual and sensitive type of hero in harsh confrontation with the reality dominant in a group of children. The problems of bullying and gangster practices which have prematurely shifted from the adult world to a younger age group, are precisely and unsparingly defined by the author. He looks closely at the question of the authority of the grown-up, who consciously and unconsciously misuses his power to implant negativism and aggressive self-affirmation into a differently-tuned human life. In Brat's prose works we meet with the authentic child with his characteristic slang, which has its different levels and different meanings corresponding to his intellectual resources in a given context. The basic storyline is the confrontation between a number of personalities, in which there is the question of marking out and maintaining one's own borders when faced by brute force and psychological pressure. In his latest prose work, *Druhé podanie* (Second Serve), the author moves to a higher age group, where he has immersed himself in the problems of the frustrated young person who, in the search for a group of close friends, exchanges the illusory feeling of freedom for the real slavery of drug addiction. The author has managed to put his finger on the spots in the hero's critical situation, where the pressure of the unfulfilled ambitions and situation of his parents have led to his rash behaviour. The inherent drama of the theme is strengthened by the dynamics of the division of the text, with film-like editing of situational sequences and critical turning points.

Similar issues in a milieu prevalingly inhabited by girls have already appeared for a number of years in the popular books by **Gabriela Futová**. It is not by

accident that this pair of authors, Gabriela Futová and Roman Brat, have in common inventive titles (*Zmätené dvojčičky zo slepej uličky*/Confused Twins from a Blind Alley, *Chlapci spadli z jahody, dievčatá z višne* (Boys Fell from Strawberry, Girls from the Cherry Tree), which present two contemporary views – that of girls and boys – of the same situations involving the family, school and first loves. Both these authors aim to encourage tolerance of a different view of the world, the natural male-female polarisation of opinion.

In her latest work Gabriela Futová has moved to a higher age category than that we have become used to in her previous books. In *Poškoláci* (The Kids in Detention), she demonstrates what can result from the misguided radical educational methods of teachers and parents who try to apply their own personal emotional attitudes and problems to their inadequate relationships with adolescent children. The author deliberately takes certain situations to absurd extremes, which do not, however, go beyond realistic borders. In a humorous way she appeals not only to parents, but also to all those in the adult population who regard problem children

with disapproval and are shocked by their extreme behaviour and appearance. In her short book Futová follows the system of a chess game in which, as a result of their own helplessness, seemingly confident and intrepid figures drive pawns into unexpected situations. Through humour the author, known for her masterly situational comedy, delves deep into serious situations and here she deliberately increases and strengthens the thought-provoking nature of her writing.

In her latest book, *Brata musíš poslúchať* (You Must Obey Your Brother!), the confrontation between siblings of different ages, a boy and a girl, once again deals with the complicated social problems of a family today, where the struggle to keep a relationship alive and survive economically brings many changes and interferes with its traditional structure. A new book by the author **Marta Hlušíková**, *Čo baby nedokážu* (What Girls Can't Do), and **Toňa Revajová's** *Johanka v Zapadáčiku* (Johanka from Little Backwoods) are also intended to contribute to social prose.

The trend towards new topics that is a result of social and other important changes in family

LUBICA KEPŠTOVÁ (1960), studied philosophy and aesthetics at the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava. She worked for a library and young people's leisure centre from 1985 to 1989. Since 1989 she has been an editor and from 1993 the deputy editor-in-chief of the magazine *Slniečko*, which is published by the Centre for Information on Literature. She contributes to magazines including the *Knížná revue* (Book Review) and the *Bibiana* magazine, reviews on contemporary children's literature and interviews with writers of children's literature. She translates into Slovak from Czech and English. Her first collection of poems *Komínový panáčik*/The Chimney Man (2001), was preceded by the folding picture books *Dobrý deň, slniečko*/Good Morning, Dear Sun (1995), *Veselé mačiatka*/Playful Kittens (1996), *Veselé šteniatka*/Playful Puppies (1996), *Veselí zajkovia*/Playful Bunnies (1996), *Mydlinky a bublinky*/Little



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Bubbles (1998). In her next collection of poems, *Moje srdce má prázdniny*/My Heart's On Holiday (2008), Lubica Kepštová rediscovers poetry's original magical and mysterious nature; she once more makes poetry a miraculous world. This collection is likened to the work of one of the most outstanding Slovak women poets – that of

Lýdia Vadkerti-Gavorníková, and thus this collection is regarded as following in the tradition of Slovak women's writing, and which she further develops. One of the dimensions of Kepštová's personality is kindness and understanding for the child's world and this is also apparent in her verses for children.

The style of her poems is characterised by her ability to express her ideas with lyrical brevity in verses with a regular, well-wrought rhythm, plentiful rhymes and witty punch lines. The author says of herself: "I am not an author who often writes. I only write when I have good reason to; I jot down many of my thoughts and observations in a notebook, where they may be waiting like seeds to germinate. I regard life too as a kind of poetry. Sometimes it is beautiful, tender and exhilarating, at other times gloomy, cynical and cruel. I would like my life to be a good poem, or at least never to be far from it."

relations has not only brought dramatic themes and scepticism, but paradoxically a strengthening of the humorous aspect, untraditional views and unconventional solutions. In this direction refreshing reading is offered by the young author **Anežka Szabóová** in her prose works *Modré nebo* (Blue Sky) and *Modré nebo II* (Blue Sky II). In an uncompromisingly frank portrayal she goes beyond the borders of moral responsibility, not however of parents for their children, but children for their spiritually and humanly immature parents.

In the Slovak context a contribution to the search for the authentic contemporary child is made by the systematic activity of the publishing house Perfekt, which for the past eight years has organised a competition of original stories for children. For this reason it publishes annually a book of short stories, in which established writers present their work alongside young writing talents, who offer a fresh and untraditional view of contemporary childhood. This year the title of the book is taken from the title of the winning story by **Kararína Švecová**: *Ako si vychovať brata* (How to Bring Up a Brother).

Positive trends have also been introduced into children's literature by **Ján Uličianský's** story *Analfabeta Negramotná* (Analphabetty Illiterate), which is notable for its creative intertextuality. Told like a fairy-tale, the story of the unconventional and generally irritating protagonist Betka Bábiková (Betty Dolly), who is known by her nickname Analphabetty, is deliberate provocation and metaphorical proof of the importance of reading and reading literacy. Analphabetty represents that section of the child population whose distaste for books goes so far that they never read a single book in their lives. Paradoxically, imprisoned in a library by a chance error, out of fear, boredom as well as the demands of the plot, she gets to know the main heroes of the leading children's bestsellers – from Tom Thumb, Pinocchio, Pippi Longstocking and others to Harry Potter, who bring her friendship, understanding and surprisingly close parallels to her own problems. Once again, Betka Bábiková, Betty Dolly, alias Analphabetty Illiterate, brings into children's literature a prototype of a negative asocial heroine, who is the embodiment of the most striking excesses and extremes of an inner and external character. As in *Malá princezná* (The Little Princess), the author here gradually lifts the curtain, revealing the equally extreme family background of the main heroine and thus eventually unravels the tangled ball produced in her life by adults.

The problem of the continual struggle for natural human values, such as friendship, the feeling of security and the family, is the leitmotif of the latest story by **Peter Karpinský** *Sedem dní v pivnici* (Seven Days in the Cellar). The adventurous wanderings of a little goblin through the spooky dark spaces of an ugly cellar, in spite of the initial hopelessness, is

transformed into an apotheosis of friendship, love and meaningful selflessness. It is not by chance that once again we find here the motif of the rescue of parents and the struggle to win for them the freedom and space they need to live together in a loving atmosphere.

The motif of the child as a symbol of hope and rescue for adults in a chaotic and confusing world, where the basic human values lose their proper worth and change into cheap fraudulent imitations, also appears in the genre of meditative, reflective lyricism that is presented in a short book of letters in verses by **Daniel Hevier**, *Vianočná pošta* (Christmas Post). The narrator and author of these three thought-provoking letters tries to rise above the burdensome and materialistic reality of this world and move to the message of the story of Christ's birth, which year after year is played out in each of us, turning to the child and not only to the divine one, with the plea to take us into his arms and protect us from the whole world.

It is an absolute paradox, but this motif, reminiscent of an upturned hourglass, appears in various forms and levels in all genres of contemporary Slovak literature for children and young people. Is it by chance, or an objective philosophical tendency in our perception of today's child? We shall see.

Translated by **Heather Trebatická**



Ján Milčák

THE TALE OF A DONKEY

(Extract)

1

First I drew a picture of a donkey. I draw or paint every day, but this drawing didn't come out right.

– What are you doing? - Kilimanjaro the tomcat asked.

– I'm drawing a donkey - I replied.

The drawing of a donkey was on a white sheet of paper. Kilimanjaro the black tomcat smiled into his whiskers. It wasn't a nasty smile. Kilimanjaro likes to smile into his whiskers. I felt like crumpling up the sheet of paper and throwing it into the bin.

– Don't do that! - Kilimanjaro exclaimed. – You have drawn a donkey.

– But it hasn't come out right - I said.

– Its left hind leg is shorter - Kilimanjaro pointed out.

– And it hasn't got a hoof - I added.

That's how Kilimanjaro the tomcat discovered that donkeys have hooves instead of claws.

– Why don't you draw an extra a hoof? - Kilimanjaro said.

– You mean I should add one to the shorter leg? - I asked.

– Yes, just draw a higher hoof - Kilimanjaro explained.

– What's a high hoof? - I wondered.

– It's like the high hooves on Mrs Agatha's shoes.

– Those aren't hooves, those are heels.

– All right then, heels - Kilimanjaro agreed.

– Do you think the donkey's legs are too short? - I asked.

– Oh no - Kilimanjaro said, - it's just that the donkey would like longer ones.

Mrs Agatha went for a walk every day. Her heels went click-clack, click-clack. There was old man who was annoyed by the sound. Nobody knew his name but everyone called him Father Simeon. He used to sit on a bench beneath the red maple. Holding a parasol in her hand, Mrs Agatha smiled a seductive smile. She reminded Kilimanjaro of Frederika the ginger cat, except that Mrs Agatha's hair wasn't ginger. And she didn't have gorgeous cat whiskers either. But she smiled like Frederika. Mrs Agatha lived in a tall house with walls that were yellow like sunflowers.

– I don't think your drawing is quite finished - Kilimanjaro pondered.

– Mind your own business - I said, fobbing him off.

– You mean my mouse-catching business?

– Kilimanjaro scoffed.

To get some peace and quiet I poured him some milk custard with little meringue islands floating on top. They were Kilimanjaro's favourites. But the tomcat wouldn't even touch the bowl.

– Are you tired? - Kilimanjaro inquired.

– Not really - I said.

– So why have you stopped working?

I wasn't sure about the high hoof on the donkey's leg. I started chewing on the end of my wooden pencil. I used to do this when I was little. But then I grew out of it. A sparrow landed on the windowsill and began to chirp. Its feathers were wet because it had just taken a bath in a puddle. As it shook off the water it got my glasses all misted up.

– Maestro, why didn't you draw a horse? - asked the sparrow.

– Leave me alone! - I said, to get rid of it.

– Are you getting lazy? That's not good enough!

– The sparrow went on chirping. It had no idea how I longed for a donkey with beautiful ears, wide nostrils and a round tummy.

– Horses are God's most beautiful creatures, after sparrows - the sparrow lectured me.

2

It was summer and apricots were ripening on the trees. The sparrow had replaced the garden turtledove on the windowsill. I kept my window open all the time. The turtledove usually came when it got colder while the sparrow would come in the summer. The turtledove pecked on millet, sunflower seeds or wheat grains. The sparrow played around.

– Why don't you do it yourself if you're so clever? - I said.

– You want me to draw? - the sparrow asked.

– Yes - I said.

– But, Maestro, you know I'm colour-blind - said the sparrow.

I held out my hand and the sparrow flew onto my palm.

– Do you want me to draw a black-and-white picture?

As the bird kept shaking itself, water from its feathers sprinkled everything around. The sparrow sat in the palm of my hand opening its beak. The

rain from its feathers fell onto the drawing. The donkey's hind leg began to disappear in a small puddle.

– Are you a magician? – I asked the sparrow.

– No, I've just had a bath in a puddle – it replied.

When the little puddle dried the donkey had three legs.

– This is great! – Kilimanjaro the tomcat said approvingly. – Everyone will admire your three-legged donkey.

The sparrow flew out of my palm and started flitting to and fro under the gothic arches of my studio.

– Why don't you draw birds? – the sparrow goaded me.

– Do you want me to draw a flock of sparrows? – I asked.

– Oh, no. Nobody would see me in a flock.

– Let me draw you, then. I'll make you as big as a grey heron.

– But herons fly away to warmer climes – the sparrow pointed out. I didn't expect a sparrow to be so clever.

Once, on a rainy afternoon, I had drawn a grey heron onto the white studio wall. It was graceful

“A little detail, magic motif or quality is enough for Milčák to overplay otherwise real story.”

Ján Gavura

and elegant, with a long beak and a rippling neck. Its eyes were as yellow as a silverweed flower. It was unlike any other bird.

– I know you don't draw sparrows – the sparrow said.

– Do you think I might miss out some of the feathers on their wings?

– No, that's not it, Maestro. I know you mean well.

The sparrow flew out of the open window. I listened to the silence.

Then I got on with mixing green paint. I painted a birch tree with long branches and tiny green leaves. A little girl was sitting underneath the tree. She wore a blouse with ruffles and an orange-coloured pleated skirt. She was a hunchback and was playing a block flute.

Kilimanjaro rubbed against my legs.

– We haven't seen her here before – piped up Kilimanjaro.

– Who? – I asked.

– Dorothy, the little girl – the tomcat said.

– Dorothy? – I repeated.

I didn't want to admit I had forgotten to say hello to Dorothy. I was glad that Kilimanjaro had come up with a name for the girl.

– Hello, Dorothy! – I said.

JÁN MILČÁK (1935),

started to publish his literary texts in the literary magazine *Mladá tvorba* and in other literary periodicals in the 1960s. In the 1970s he established himself as the author of radio plays for youths and adults: *The Parade of Angels* (Sprievod anjelov, 1971), *The Cat* (Mačka, 1973), *Soldiers* (Vojaci, 1978), *Runners* (Bežci, 1982), *Search* (Pátranie, 1986), *Boat* (Čln, 1992), *Boy Named Simeon* (Chlapec Simeon 2000), *The Baroque Clouds* (Barokové oblaky, 2003), *Bubulo, the Little Devil* (Čertík Bubulo, 2004), *Forgotten Wardrobe* (Zabudnutá skriňa, 2008). His theatre plays include: *Master* (Majster, 1974), *Fiddlers* (Hudci, 1983), *Right for Life* (Právo na život, 1992), *The Canvas* (Plátno, 2007). Short



Photo © Author's Archive

prose works and children's books include: *From Four Little Bags* (Zo štyroch kapsičiek,

1988), *The Little Lantern Boy* (Chlapec Lampášik, 1996), *James Big Ears* (Jakub s veľkými ušami, 2010), *The Thirteenth Chamber* (Trinásta komnata, 2011). In 2012 he published a children's book, beautifully illustrated by Renáta Milčáková, *The Tale of a Donkey* (Rozprávka o oslíkovi). In this there is an empty sheet of paper at the beginning and a magic painter who can make the painting come to life by talking to it. He starts painting a donkey. First, it has just three legs, but the painter's cat, Kilimanjaro, makes him also draw the fourth. And so the story about friendship and mutual help between a gossipy sparrow, the little monkey Frederika, the little girl Doroška and others can start.

3

The donkey was still one leg short. I decided I liked it anyway even though I knew how hard and uncomfortable it must be to be standing on three legs. I started talking to it. I said something incomprehensible.

The donkey was surprised by everything it saw. The only things he knew were the objects in my room, the wardrobe, an old upholstered chair, the tall book case, the weasel, my desk with pencils, charcoal sticks, crayons, the magnifying glass, tubes of paint, paintbrushes, the maulstick, the palette knife, the cloths. He kept asking questions. He was like an inquisitive child. There was nothing unusual about that, as I quite often talk to my drawings.

– Why do you keep all this junk?

– It's not junk – I objected.

– What's all this stuff called? – the donkey asked.

– Pencil, crayons, paintbrushes, magnifying glass, maulstick, cloths – I said pointing in turn at each object with my finger.

– Enough! – the donkey exclaimed. – How am I supposed to remember so many things?

– Can you manage to keep quiet for a moment? – I asked.

– I prefer to talk, seeing as I can't move – said the donkey.

– Well, the drawing hasn't come out right. You've only got three legs – I said.

– Are three legs not enough? – the donkey asked in surprise.

– Well, it seems too few to me, – I said.

– The little bird that was flying around here a minute ago only had two legs.

– You mean the sparrow?

Obviously, the reason why sparrows have two legs and two wings is so that they don't have to fly or hop around all the time. The donkey nodded in agreement.

– You don't have any wings – I explained.

– What use would they be to me? – asked the donkey.

I thought the donkey had a point; feathers wouldn't be of any use to a donkey with a rounded tummy, wide nostrils and beautiful ears.

– All the donkeys I've ever met or seen had four legs.

– So why do I have only three? – the donkey kept pressing.

I was taken aback by this conversation. It was rare for me to be baffled.

– It's obvious! The drawing isn't finished! – I shouted at the top of my voice. I sharpened a crayon, straightened the paper and without thinking about it I drew the first lines.

Kilimanjaro the tomcat sat on a pillow watching me intently. I drew the donkey's left hind leg. It came

out the same as the right one. I went out into the garden. A ripe apricot fell into my arms. The first of this year's crop.

– I'll keep it for the donkey, – I thought. I rushed up the stairs. The studio was on the first floor. I found the donkey chewing hay.

Translated by **Julia Sherwood**

The book *The Tale of a Donkey* (Rozprávka o oslíkovi) was published by Trio Publishing, Bratislava, 2012.

“Milčák never forgets to indicate that magic is principally an inner disposition natural for children and those adults who have decided to stick with it.”
Ján Gavura



Toňa Revajová

JOHANKA FROM LITTLE BACKWOODS

(Extract)

Chapter Six

Even before the first lesson I get a surprise. Boris comes to show me a drawing he has divided up with lines, just like I did when I drew pictures on a box. In the spaces there are fruit trees and bushes – and to be quite sure no one ever again makes a mistake, their names are written under each picture: APPLE, PEAR, PLUM, CHERRY, WALNUT, RASPBERRY, BLACKBERRY, REDCURRANT, BLACKCURRANT, GOOSEBERRY. I immediately notice that there is no great difference between an apple tree and a cherry tree. Only that the cherry stretches upwards and the apple tree sideways.

“Wow,” I say. “Super idea. It’s for art class?”

“No, for you,” said Boris. “You draw well, you’ll need it.”

“Thanks,” I whisper. I know I should say something more, but I am as silent as a fish.

“So no twits will make fun of you again,” says Boris and he goes back to his desk.

It is not until the maths lesson that I realise he was joking. The only one making fun of me was him. And that very tactfully. A moment later I remember how I was lost for words. That seems funny to me and I cover my mouth with both my hands. But the teacher can see what I am doing by my eyes.

“A very funny problem, Johanka?” she asks.

“No, no, the problem’s alright,” I say, getting to my feet. “But.... Sorry. I’m just terribly surprised that I can be as silent as a fish. I hope I don’t open and shut my mouth like one too.”

“Well, well, dear,” the teacher begins, but she doesn’t finish, because something makes her want to laugh.

“I’m beginning to like her too,” says Boris without putting up his hand.

At this the whole class falls silent and some of the children really do stare with wide eyes and gaping mouths at Boris. But then Adam mutters: “Whacha are is whacha get!” and everyone laughs.

During the break I take the drawing to show to the teacher. I say I got it from Boris. That was why I’d

been struck dumb. From surprise. I ask whether the picture could be photocopied, so we could have it on the noticeboard. The teacher says that colour copying is expensive, but that in this case the headmistress might make an exception.

“I’ll arrange it,” I say. “Is she there now?”

The teacher shakes her head and smiles: “I didn’t know you had it in you, Johanka!” She asks us to be good for a while and goes off to the staff room. Because ours is a small school and the headmistress doesn’t have her own office.

I’m wondering whether I heard right. I’d expected her to say, “I didn’t know you could be so stubborn, Johanka.” Because I am stubborn when I get something into my head.

On the way home I try to picture what it would be like if we had all Boris’s trees and bushes in our garden. Mummy might be having a cup of coffee. I imagine bringing a clean piece of drawing paper, sitting down next to her and planning together where to put the raspberries, gooseberries and walnut tree. We’ve already got two apple trees and one rather small pear tree. Fortunately I don’t like currants, red or black.

Suddenly I almost make myself cry. I know exactly what it would be like. Like at Grandma’s, but higgledy-piggledy and in a smaller version. In the summer, when Grandma took time off so she could look after me for two weeks, every other day she would bake us a cake that she and Grandpa called heavenly. She put everything that was ripening in the garden into it. Cherries, strawberries, raspberries, rhubarb... Once I asked her why “heavenly”. Because I make it when our garden’s like the Garden of Eden, Grandma said.

When I get home, I immediately realise that the new garden will have to wait. Mummy has changed Samko into his pyjamas. She brushes a kiss on my hair and doesn’t even ask how it went and what we had for lunch.

“If you try getting Samko off to sleep I could cut out that dress,” Mummy says.

“Hurrah,” I say and reach out to take Samko. Mummy first puts him down and shows me how to hold him so he won’t slip out of bed.

“You mustn’t let him move about. Then it’s quick.”

“Alright, alright,” I say. As if I didn’t know him. But it turns out that it really isn’t so easy. Samko manages to wriggle out of bed a couple of times and keeps on trying. In the end I succeed in pinning him down. I need a leg and both arms to do it.

I look at Samko and watch his upper eyelid getting slowly nearer his lower one. By the time his eyes are shut at last I’m aching all over. I have a good stretch and wonder whether to get down to my homework or stay in bed and read for a while. I choose the latter and go to get Klára Bôbiková.

First I look at the cover. *That’s Just Like Me, Klára Bôbiková*. The picture is of a little girl lost in thought. I half-close my eyes and open the book at random somewhere after the first third. Then I turn over a couple more pages and at last look at what I’m going to read.

Ah, Klára’s mummy is trying to deal with the problems caused by her own father. A friend of Klára’s grandfather goes into a home for retired people. His name is Bert and he is fed up with eating nothing but buttered toast and cheese. But dogs are not allowed in the home. So they won’t all be sad, Klára’s grandpa smuggles both dogs in every evening and every morning he smuggles them out. Just as this is working out fine, one of the dogs runs from the room into another and massacres an old lady’s parrot. This leads to a big investigation and Klára’s father is finally named the guilty party.

It’s probably meant to be funny, but it is rather sad. It’s quite clear in fact that men behave like little boys, even when they get to be old people. When

I think about it now, I realise that I’ve suspected that for a long time.

Otherwise nothing happens in the Bôbiková family that I don’t already know. Whereas in our kitchen...

I pretend to be going for a drink, but in fact I want to find out how far Mummy has got with my dress. It turns out she has not been idle. She has already cut the pieces out of the material and now she is sewing them together with a needle.

“Did he go to sleep?” she asks. “It’s good you’ve come, I’ll tack this together and we can try it on in a minute.”

I tell Mummy how it was in school and the minute goes very fast. Mummy dresses me like a little girl, but what she pins me into is definitely not a dress. Just some kind of long T-shirt with one sleeve. I’m not sure I want to be so modern. Especially now that I don’t go anywhere.

“This will be...”

Mummy laughs. “One day I’ll tell you how I learned to sew,” she says, haphazardly sticking pins into the dress. “Don’t worry, it will have two sleeves and there will be a frill down here. So... please calm down. And above all, don’t make faces, okay?”

I slip off the dress, taking care not to let the pins scratch me. Mummy puts it on the table, folds it in half and again does something with the pins.

“There’s some blancmange for you in the fridge,” she says when she notices me.

I take out the cold dish. It’s caramel blancmange and I can’t put it on the table.

“It’s a pity today is not one day,” I sigh.

TOŇA REVAJOVÁ (1948)

writes original fairy tales and books for children and young adults, e.g. *Half the Holidays with Auntie Littlewheels* (Pol prázdnin s tetou Kolieskovou, 1989), about the friendship between a little schoolboy and a woman in a wheelchair or *The Diary of Lilly from the Lighthouse* (Denník Majky z Majáka, 2001). This records the events of a few days in the life of a grammar school student, depicting her family and a family in a foreign country, where she goes to work as a baby-sitter. *Denis and His Sisters* (Denis a jeho sestry, 2007), brings us the story of a nine-year-old boy, Denis Michalík, who lives a harmonious life in a city with his family. Denis’s parents decide to adopt a girl, Mirka, just a bit



Photo © Ludovít Kupkovič

younger than Denis, from a foster home. She starts visiting the Michalík’s family on a regular basis. Through her, Denis learns about the reality of other, less fortunate, children from incomplete families, those which

have unemployed parents or children placed to foster homes. *Johanka from Little Backwoods* (Johanka v Zasadáčiku, 2012), tells the story of fourth-grader Johanka who, because of financial problems, moves with her mother and little brother to a tiny house in a small village in the back-country. Soon she makes friends at school and reveals her creative talents. The only thing she misses is a normal bathroom and her grandparents. *Good Luck, Johanka!* (Zlom väz, Johanka!, 2012) is a loose sequel to her story. Although Revajová deals with problems of contemporary society (unemployment, incomplete families, child-adoption) she does it humorously, with a detachment and according to the age of a child.

Mummy gives me a puzzled look. I remind her that if it was, she could tell me how she learned to sew. Mummy says that when she was little, she always had the most beautiful dresses in the class. Grandma used to sew them for her. At that time all the mummies sewed and knitted, because there was nothing in the shops. This comes as a surprise to me.

“Why didn’t they shut the shops if they hadn’t got anything to sell?”

“Well... actually they did have something, but never anything pretty. Just some black coats or grey dresses for old women. Brown blouses. Only working coats were white. Or blue. Depending.”

I understand why people had to look after themselves. I wouldn’t want to go around in a grey dress and black coat either. When people get old their tastes probably change.

“Fortunately Grandma was a world champion in invention. And whenever she tried anything on me, I used to make the same faces as you. It’ll be like thiiiiis? It’s too biiiiig... And one day Grandma lost her temper. She grabbed everything that was on the table and threw it over my head.”

“Over your head?”

“I was surprised too,” said Mummy. “She probably meant to throw it at my head, but the material was so light, it landed on my head. I remember I couldn’t see anything for a minute and I was taken aback by what was going on.”

“Did anything else happen?”

“Not really. I was taken aback and Grandma said: That’s that. Sew for yourself, if you can do it better.”

I can’t image my grannie getting so angry. Only if Mummy really provoked her.

“How old were you?” I ask.

“Thirteen?” says Mummy.

“Ah,” I say. “You were a teenager. Teenagers are always horrid. And then?”

“Then what,” Mummy threw up her hands. “I sewed for myself. Can’t you see how well I do it?”

I remember Boris and pull the trees and bushes out of my satchel. Mummy looks at me and says: “That’s nice. Are you going to draw ten pictures on every piece of paper?”

“Does it look as if I drew it?”

“Well, I don’t know,” Mummy considers, but she isn’t looking at the pictures any more so she won’t prick herself.

I go outside so that Mummy can concentrate. I walk

“Simple rural conditions can bring disappointment to a child, yet they create an ideal space for the writer to peer, in a bit volatile manner, into the children’s world.”
Peter Mišák

round the garden with the drawing and look to see where we could have a pear tree, a walnut tree, raspberries and gooseberries. There would be no room for any more. In the end, however, I move the walnut tree to the other side of the fence and then I have enough room for strawberries as well. So we’d have them if Mummy happened to want to bake the heavenly cake. I’m surprised Boris didn’t draw strawberries, but I soon realise why. They don’t grow on trees or on bushes either.

Translated by **Heather Trebatická**

The book *Johanka from Little Backwoods* (Johanka v Zapadáčiku) was published by Vydavateľstvo Slovart, Bratislava, 2012.



Marta Hlušíková

WAS MÄDELS NICHT SCHAFFEN

Wir haben keine normale Familie

(Leseprobe)

Ich und mein Bruder Braňo haben keine normale Familie. In jeder normalen Familie kümmert sich nämlich die Mama um die Kinder, sie läuft ihnen nach, wenn sie ihre Hände nicht waschen und die Zähne nicht putzen, und bereitet ihnen ein Frühstück zu, das man essen kann. Die Väter kontrollieren die Klassenbücher, trinken Bier und gehen zum Fußball. Die Omas machen Obst ein, singen und die Opas spielen Schach.

Unsere Familie muss irgendwann in der Urzeit von einer seelischen Katastrophe heimgesucht worden sein. Gäbe eine Medaille für Andersartigkeit, bei uns würde sie in Überlebensgröße über der Eingangstür hängen, denn: Meine Mama turnt jeden Morgen die Fünf Tibeter, zeigt uns schreckliche Bilder von Bazillen, die in uns einziehen, wenn wir uns die Hände nicht waschen, und sie kontrolliert nicht, ob wir uns die Zähne putzen, sondern sagt nur, wir sollen unser Sparschwein für den Zahnarzt füttern. Zudem macht sie kein normales Frühstück, sondern setzt uns einen ekelhaften Brei vor. Angeblich Zerealien mit Joghurt und Früchten. Keine Brötchen mit Butter und Wurst, kein Rührei. Vati sagt einmal im Monat zu mir, ich lerne für mich selbst, und wenn ich keine Lust habe, soll ich ein Zeichen geben, er macht für mich ein Praktikum bei der Müllabfuhr aus. Oma spielt oft Sherlock Holmes und Opa erzählt uns Geschichten, nach denen Braňo und ich abends nicht einschlafen können. Außerdem leben in unserer Familie vier Hunde. Ist das alles normal?

Es leben die Kerle!

Unsere Oma hat gestern gelesen, dass Frauen klüger und geschickter sind als Männer. Bestimmt in irgendeiner Frauenzeitschrift. Darin loben Frauen

immer sich selbst und machen sich wichtiger, als sie in Wirklichkeit sind (hat Opa gesagt). Weil auch Vati damit nicht einverstanden ist, dass Frauen klüger sind, sagte er, er würde noch heute alle Kerle (das heißt Opa, Braňo und mich) mit zur Hütte nehmen. *Wir schaffen es, dort von heute bis morgen Abend zu überleben ohne euch und eure Klugheit*, sagte Vati und ich bemerkte mit Verwunderung, dass Mama sich ziemlich freute. Von wegen sie erholt sich von uns. Juhuu! Das ist super! Wenn Frauen so klug sind, dann sollen sie zuhause hocken. Wir Kerle kommen auch ohne sie zurecht.

Als wir zur Hütte kamen, schaute uns Vati vielsagend an. – Hütte ist Hütte. Wenn wir es warm haben wollen, müssen wir diesen Stamm zersägen.

– Den Bock zum Holzsägen kennt ihr – ergänzte Vati und türmte einen Stamm auf den Bock so groß wie die halbe Hütte. Dann begannen er und Opa, den Stamm zu zersägen. Sie sägten etwa eine halbe Stunde. – Jungs, Opa und ich gehen mal ins Dorf auf ein Bierchen. Passt ihr solange auf den Bock auf! Etwas so Seltsames habe ich noch nie gehört. Auf einen hölzernen Bock aufpassen!

– Wozu sollen wir auf ihn aufpassen, wenn er aus Holz ist und nicht weglaufen kann? – sage ich zu Braňo. Aber er benahm sich als wäre er gar nicht mein Bruder.

– Vati hat gesagt aufpassen und fertig! – sagte er und zog die Säge von der Mitte des Stamms zu sich. – Die Säge muss auf meiner Seite sein! – ziehe ich die Säge auf meine Seite.

Auf meiner! – zieht Braňo die Säge zu sich. So zogen wir an der Säge wie zwei Dummköpfe, bis es dunkel wurde. Rums! Der Stamm brach in zwei Hälften durch, genau als Vati und Opa zurückkehrten.

„Unsere Familie muss irgendwann in der Urzeit von einer seelischen Katastrophe heimgesucht worden sein. Gäbe eine Medaille für Andersartigkeit, bei uns würde sie in Überlebensgröße über der Eingangstür hängen...“

Na bitte! Und da soll einer sagen, Mädels seien geschickter als Kerle! – lobten sie uns.

– Weil ihr so geschickt wart, bringe ich euch morgen bei, wie man ein Indianerfeuer legt, – vermeldete Opa am Abend in der Hütte. Wir wollten ihn fragen, wo er gelernt hat, Indianerfeuer zu legen, doch genau nachdem er das gesagt hat, schlief unser Opa ein.

Jetzt weiß ich, was Mädels nicht schaffen

Heute zeige ich euch also, wie man ein Feuer legt. Ein echtes indianisches. Die Wiese, auf der das Feuer brennen soll, ist aber ziemlich weit weg, – sagte am Morgen Opa und unter seiner Aufsicht mussten wir Brot, Zwiebeln, Bratwürste und eine Flasche Wasser in unsere Beutel packen. Vati ließen wir das Dach reparieren und unter Opas Führung brachen wir auf zum Indianermarsch.

– Ich würde das Feuer hier legen, unterm Baum, – schlug Braňo vor, weil er keine Lust hatte, über den ganzen Berg zu gehen.

– Ich auch, – schloss ich mich an.

– Und wenn du ein Baum wärst, würde es dir gefallen, direkt über dem Feuer zu stehen? – bohrte Opa seine Augen in mich. Er bohrt immer erst in

mich, weil ich älter bin und angeblich mehr Verstand haben soll.

– Wahrscheinlich würde es mir an den Ästen brennen. Und an den Blättern...

– Na seht ihr. Bei so einem Feuer können auch kleine Vögel in den Nestern verbrennen. Legt lieber nie Feuer unter einem Baum.

Ich und Braňo atmeten durch, weil wir vielleicht den kleinen Vögeln das Leben gerettet hatten. Sofort lief es sich fröhlicher. Als wir nach einem einstündigen Marsch dachten, alle Wiesen seien aus der Welt verschwunden, tauchte unsere endlich auf. Hohes Gras wuchs darauf, ein schwacher Wind wehte darüber. Es sah aus wie ein Grasmeer.

Wir wollten uns endlich auf die alten vertrockneten Stämme setzen, doch unser Opa wurde plötzlich zum Indianerhäuptling und erteilte Befehle: – Ein Indianer darf nicht müde sein! Maťo holt Holz, Braňo bereitet die Bratwürste und die Zwiebeln vor! Erst als wir damit fertig waren, zeigte uns Opa, wie man ein indianisches Feuer legt: Erst wird das Gras vorsichtig entfernt, die Feuerstelle rundherum mit Steinen ausgelegt, damit die Flamme nicht wegläuft, und schon zaubert sich aus trockenen Zweigen und Zündhölzern das erste Flämmchen. Opa fügte dem Feuerchen nach und nach weitere Zweige und Äste

MARTA HLUŠÍKOVÁ (1952), Mittelschulpädagogin, Schriftstellerin und Autorin mehrerer Fachbuchpublikationen. Sie begann mit dem Schreiben von Gedichten und Märchen. Später, ab 1989, schrieb sie intensiver Poesie, Prosa und Drama, orientiert sich aber vor allem auf Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Für dieses Publikum veröffentlichte sie mindestens 200 Geschichten, Gedichte und Märchen. Einige davon finden sich auch in Lesebüchern für die Grundschule. Im Jahre 2000 erschien ihr *Wörterbuch der lateinischen Zitate* (Slovník latinsko-slovenských citátov) und 2001 *Das Lateinisch-slowakische Wörterbuch* (Latinsko-slovenský slovník). Im Jahr 2003 erschien die Gedichtsammlung *Steine* (Kamene), im 2005 die Prosasammlung *Gärten* (Záhrady), 2008 *Das Jahr der roten Maulbeeren* (Rok červených moruší). Für Kinder und Jugendliche veröffentlichte sie die hinreißenden Titel *Wo die Spinnen die Zuckerwatte weben* (Kde pavúky tkajú cukrovú vatu,



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2008), *Ich hasse es, wenn sie mir den Kopf streicheln* (Neznášam, keď ma hladkajú po hlave, 2009; dafür gewann sie die Prämie des Literarischen Fonds für das Jahr 2009 und den Preis Bibiana für das beste Buch 2009), *Das Buchstabenland, oder wo die Rufzeichen regnen* (Písmenkovo alebo Tam, kde pršia výkričníky, 2009) und *Die Bläschenmärchen*

(Bublínkové rozprávky, 2010). Ihr jüngstes Buch, *Was Mädels nicht schaffen* (Čo baby nedokážu, 2011), ist die Geschichte zweier Brüder, die sich mit einem neuen Geschwisterchen in der Familie abfinden müssen. Die Autorin schildert plastisch die Atmosphäre der Vorbereitung der Familie auf die kleine Schwester. Sie nutzt dabei das traditionelle Motiv der Bedrohung, das einen Bruchpunkt im Denken ihrer Helden darstellt. Die Schwester Lili kommt früher zur Welt und kämpft im Krankenhaus um ihr Leben. Die Angst um das Leben ihrer Schwester mobilisiert die beiden Jungen und sie finden sich leichter damit ab, dass sie sich nun ihre Position in der Familie teilen müssen. Marta Hlušíková gehört zu den Autoren, die ihre Botschaft überzeugend auf die nacherzählte Geschichte gründen. Das Buch ist eine leichtverständliche und lustige Lektüre für Kinder, spricht aber zweifellos auch einen breiteren Leserkreis an.

hinzu, bis es richtig brannte. Dann spießten wir Bratwürste mit Zwiebeln auf die Ruten, die Opa geschnitzt hatte.

– Wer hat dir beigebracht, Feuer zu machen? – fragte ich Opa Ďusi, als wir die letzte Bratwurst gegessen hatten. Der antwortete aber nicht. Genau wie gestern Abend. Er ruhte sich aus. Den Hut hatte er übers Gesicht gelegt, sein Bauch hob und senkte sich gleichmäßig und er schnarchte leise. Als ob es irgendwo weit entfernt donnern würde.

Vorsichtig schlichen wir mit Braňo von der Wiese zum Waldrand, weil wir dachten, wir könnten dort Pilze suchen.

– Hörst du das? – blieb Braňo plötzlich stehen und riss die Augen auf.

Tatsächlich! Unser Indianerhäuptling streitet mit jemandem! Schnell rannten wir zum Feuer. Wir bemerkten, dass Opas rechter Schuh verbrannt ist, während er still gedonnert hat. Jetzt schimpfte er entweder mit dem Schuh oder mit sich selbst.

– Wo soll ich denn jetzt solche Schuhe

„Unsere Oma hat gestern gelesen, dass Frauen klüger und geschickter sind als Männer. Bestimmt in irgendeiner Frauenzeitschrift. Darin loben Frauen immer sich selbst und machen sich wichtiger, als sie in Wirklichkeit sind (hat Opa gesagt).“

herbekommen? Aus echtem Leder! Samtweich! Was wird die Meine nur zu mir sagen? – klagte er.

Opa Ďusi lamentierte noch eine Weile, dann scharfte er die Kohlenstückchen auseinander, damit die Feuerstelle schneller auskühlt, und wir alle begannen uns für den Rückweg vorzubereiten. Schließlich wollten wir die Feuerstelle mit Wasser aus dem nahegelegenen Bach aufgießen, aber Opa sagte, echte Indianer machen es ganz anders. Bis dahin hatte ich noch nie auf eine Feuerstelle gepinkelt. Jetzt konnte ich mit Braňo es endlich probieren.

– Das hier können Mädels nicht! – lachte Opa Ďusi und wir kicherten mit ihm.

Übersetzt von **Veronika Szeheřová**

Das Buch *Was Mädels nicht schaffen* (Čo baby nedokážu) erschien im Verlag SPN – Mladé letá, Bratislava, 2011.



Ján Uličiansky

ANALPHABETTY ILLITERATE

(Extract)

Chapter Three, where Analphabetty catches Pinocchio by the nose

You will surely be able to feel yourselves in the situation: how Analphabetty felt when she discovered that the library was indeed locked and she was there completely alone.

ALONE?!

Yes, if we don't count the hundreds of books and inside them the thousands of book heroes, waiting for a new reader to breathe life into them once more. Because in each new reading, book heroes can experience their adventures again.

ADVENTURES?!

We can't describe every book as an adventure book, but some of them have it even in their names. For example:

THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER

THE ADVENTURES OF THE DAWN TREADER

Or... THE ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO

Certainly, that had to be in the library of Bookville-upon-Váh also. When Analphabetty crawled out behind the screen, she stretched all her limbs, as cats do when they wake from sleep.

OOHAAAAH...!

She looked all round. There was absolute silence in the library. With the onset of evening the place was veiled in dusk, and the shelves full of books began to make a strange impression. In the children's section, on the shelf marked with a large letter C, Betty noticed a small wooden puppet. It was a boy with a pointed nose and a peaked cap.

PINOCCHIO!

Analphabetty did not understand why this little man was sitting on the shelf with C. She had no idea that books in a library are usually arranged in alphabetical order according to their authors' names. Now the author of Pinocchio was an Italian writer who went by the name of Carlo Collodi.

AHA!

Two Cs, no less, in one name.

As we know, Analphabetty didn't have the slightest interest in dolls or puppets. But Pinocchio began to get interested in her! If Betty, as she walked through

the library, had turned around, she would not have failed to notice how his mischievous eyes winked at her in the dusk. And straight away the little wooden man's mouth extended in a broad smile. Suddenly he jumped up and called out:

"Hey, you! What are you doing here?"

Analphabetty started. She thought that the old lady librarian had returned to the building, and in a flash it went through her head that she'd have to think up some excuse quickly, why she'd let herself be locked in. Quite clearly, there was no time to find some new hiding place. She turned – and froze. Whose was this ridiculous little voice?

CLOP... CLOP... CLOP... CLOP

Betty was fully alert. A quiet rapping could be heard in the room, as if someone was running along the wooden floor.

PINOCCHIO!

The wooden puppet really had come to life, and Betty was aware in the dusk that he was running after her along the top shelf.

"Well, what are you gaping at?" he asked her. "You're not surprised, are you, that I'm speaking? Even though it's true that I don't feel the best in this little wooden man, but what can one do? Not every wood-carver has the skill of Geppetto, my Dad. And when it comes down to it, this that you see – really, it's not myself. It's just a toy for kids. A souvenir. Or, if you prefer, an advertising attraction. I'm here to attract you... so that you'll approach the shelf where the books with my adventures are stacked. Here you are, take one, open it – and we'll be able to talk about anything you like!"

Analphabetty at first was unable to say a word. It's true that after her experiences with Johnny the Pea she might have taken it as normal that fairytale characters in the library live their own lives, and if we like, they can become our friends. Even so, she stood in the middle of the room with her mouth open.

"Why are you gaping like a log? You're looking like I did shortly before my Dad Geppetto carved my mouth, so that I could speak. To say nothing of ears, which he completely forgot about at the beginning. The main thing is, he didn't forget the nose! On account of that I've become the best-known fairytale character in the whole world."

Pinocchio proudly thrust out his chest, and the

astonished Analphabetty noticed that his nose grew a tiny bit longer. (That always happened to him when he was lying. Now, when somebody boasts that he's the most famous in all the world, he's coming very close indeed to telling lies.)

Analphabetty stretched out her hand in the darkness and caught this wooden boaster by the nose. Not that she wanted to hurt him or punish him; she only wanted to convince herself that she wasn't dreaming all this.

"Ouch! What are you doing? Do you want to fight? You'd better not start anything with me! I'll knock you over with a big thick book, like I flattened that smart-alec grasshopper with the hammer!"

"Who are you calling a grasshopper?" Betty felt insulted. (She had no idea of the part that a speaking grasshopper played in Pinocchio's adventures.) Although she let go of the

little wooden figure's nose, she gave him a good box on the ear:

"Oh, sure, I'm curious about you, you piece of wood! Do you think I stayed here to solve some problem of yours? Forget it! Leave me alone, OK? I didn't run away from home because of you, to have anything to do with you particularly!"

"So you ran away from home too? PERFETTO! Welcome to the club!" Pinocchio brightened up. After a moment, however, he added: "I'm curious whether you'll turn out like me."

"How?" Betty didn't understand.

"When you run away from your Dad, you have to come through all sorts of things before you realise that he was the

best Dad in the world."

Betty glared at him and sat on one of the small red chairs that were laid out for young readers in the

"Analphabetty did not understand why this little man was sitting on the shelf with C. She had no idea that books in a library are usually arranged in alphabetical order according to their authors' names."

JÁN ULÍČIANSKY (1955)

is one of the most interesting figures on the Slovak literary scene. He writes books for adults as well as for children, and works as dramaturge, director and university lecturer. After studies at the School of Puppetry of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, he started to work in the Puppet Theatre in Košice. Later he devoted himself to children's literature by writing and working for Slovak Radio. He also lectures in dramaturgy and puppetry at the Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts in Bratislava. Since 1997 he has been president of the Slovak IBBY Section.

As a playwright he has been writing radio plays for children and young adults, puppet plays for theatre, and adaptations of Slovak folk tales since 1970s. His debut was the writing of the pop-up book *Riddles* (Hádanky, 1981, 1984, 1989), followed by a book of fairy tales, *Adelka Bellflower* (Adelka Zvončeková, 1981), focusing on objects and figures from his childhood. For this book Uličianský



Photo © Author's Archive

was awarded the Slovak Literary Fund prize in 1981. His other book *Isles of Snowmen*, (Snehuliacke ostrovy, 1990), was awarded the Mladé Letá Prize in 1990 and entered the IBBY Honour List in 1992. *We've got Emma* (Máme Emu, 1993) focuses on a child's ability to shift from the world of fantasy to one of reality. The author's characteristic artistic techniques were developed in

Marvellous Tales from Seven Seas (Podivuhodné príbehy siedmich morí, 2003).

One of the most successful titles is the book *Puss on Skates* (Kocúr na kolieskových korčuľiach, 2006), describing in a modern way the eternal love of children for animals. An obvious reference to Saint-Exupéry's *Little Prince* can be detected in his *Little Princess* (Malá princezná, 2009). The author's ever-present attempt not only to entertain his children readers, but also to give them educational value, is present in his newest book *Analphabetty Illiterate* (Analfabeta Negramotná, 2011). Ján Uličianský is also author of numerous radio and puppet plays. He has also written a play for adults, *Allergy* (Alergia, 1995), and the television drama *Tablecloth with Initials* (Obrus s monogramom, 1999). His works have been translated into German, Czech, Russian, English and French. Ján Uličiansky received the Triple Rose Award in 1998 for his achievements in children's literature.

children's section. A nervous trembling began in her leg. That was an unflinching sign that she was going to explode shortly. When it happened at home, her granny used to comment as follows:

"The devils are sewing again in this girl of ours! If we hadn't thrown out that old sewing machine, the SINGER that I used to love, we could have seated her at it. At least we'd have got something useful from her. All that shaking – and for nothing!"

Obviously, Analphabetty couldn't stand such commentaries, and she preferred to go off to her room. Little Pinocchio could have no idea of the reason why she began to get angry then. Any mention of her father to Analphabetty always evoked strange feelings. Especially if someone referred to "THE BEST DAD IN THE WORLD", that really gave her a turn. She had been hearing since she was little that he was THE WORST. And so she wasn't even able to live with them in the one household.

Pinocchio understood that he'd said something stupid. He clambered up on the armrest of Betty's chair, and for a change he too began kicking his heels.

"SCUSA," he said in Italian, which means "sorry". After being silent a while, he added: "I just wanted to warn you, when you go out into this world, to be careful of lame foxes and blind tomcats. And also, of course, outlaws."

"What are you on about?" Analphabetty didn't understand. "Tell me, please, where in this city could I meet a lame fox?"

"Maybe not a fox, but a cunning person who'll take everything you have from you, they're on every corner."

Surprised, Betty looked at Pinocchio. She'd thought he'd be only a little wooden imbecile, and suddenly here was this little fellow giving her wise advice about life. For a while she said nothing, then she asked him quietly:

"Why do you think that Dad of yours was the best of all?"

Pinocchio smiled, blew his long nose, and said:

"And what would you think of a father who in harsh winter sells the only coat he has, in order to buy you a SPELLING-BOOK?"

"A spelling-book? And what did you need that for?" Betty did not understand.

"So that I'd be a clever boy, stupid!" Pinocchio sighed. "But he sacrificed himself for me uselessly, because I sold that spelling-book for four groats, just to be able to buy a ticket for the puppet theatre."

"First a spelling-book, and then a puppet theatre! One more stupid than the other," Analphabetty thought. Even though she had to admit it had never yet entered

her head that she could sell her textbooks to someone and afterwards buy something more useful.

"You're not such a dumbo as you look!" Betty said to Pinocchio, grinning.

"A dumbo?" The wooden figurine didn't understand.

"Aha, of course. You're not from the present day. That's said of someone who's completely out of touch. He understands nothing. He's really backward, in short."

That set Pinocchio off further:

"You are a dumbo, if you want to know! Judging by all the things you don't grasp, it seems you don't know even one of the stories of Pinocchio's adventures," the little wooden man said, raging, and he jumped to the ground. Insulted, he went off to his place.

CLOP... CLOP... CLOP... CLOP
"Wait, don't go away," Betty called

after him. Maybe she realised that with this long-nosed smart-alec there was more fun than she could expect here all on her own.

Pinocchio stopped and turned to her:

"Come with me, then... and read my favourite page. You'll find it easily, because it has a folded corner. I know that isn't good, but, well, you know me... first I have to do everything badly so that afterwards I can improve."

"I might have expected as much, that when I hide in a library, everyone will force me to read," Betty grumbled, but she rose from her chair and went after him.

Translated by **John Minahane**

The book *Analphabetty Illiterate* (Analfabeta Negramotná) was published by Trio Publishing, Bratislava, 2011.

"I might have expected as much, that when I hide in a library, everyone will force me to read."



THERE'S A CHILD SLUMBERING IN EVERYONE OF US

Interview with author Ján Uličiansky

• **Dušan Zupka:** *Children's literature has a special status among the literary genres. Though children are its primary audience, adult readers also are often eager to read it. Why is it so attractive across generations?*

– **Ján Uličiansky:** In every adult person there's a child slumbering, whether we want to acknowledge it or not. As the years roll on, that child in us calls out more and more urgently. There was a time when the narratives in children's books, the fairytales and stories of fantasy and adventure, drew us into the complexity of the world we would have to live in as adult people. Returning to the values that we were confronted with as little children is very necessary for us with the passage of time, because we forget them.

• **Dušan Zupka:** *Is the child reader's relationship to books changing under the influence of modern technologies (including electronic publications)?*

– **Ján Uličiansky:** Yes, of course: it's just a question of how those technologies are used. Personally, I like to read electronic books too, especially if they're interactive and "well thought out", such as, for example, the electronic version of my own book, *The Little Princess*, published by iAdverti. Apart from background music and the animation of the individual figures, this book offers an opportunity to read the text in various languages pretty well simultaneously, which I find fascinating.

• **Dušan Zupka:** *So then, do we have any reason to dread the future, to be afraid that books will lose their popularity with the little readers?*

– **Ján Uličiansky:** Everything depends on how we adults confront this problem: passively or actively. That holds true of children's upbringing generally. Whether they'll read or not, whether they'll eat healthily or whether they'll become prone to obesity and run the associated risks such as diabetes, or what sort of scale of values they'll establish.

• **Dušan Zupka:** *What was it in children's books that captivated you?*

– **Ján Uličiansky:** The fantasy and the playfulness, the poetry and the humour. No good children's book can be without those.

• **Dušan Zupka:** *What are your immediate projects?*

– **Ján Uličiansky:** In the field of literature for children and youth I have "experimented" with a text which, unlike my previous work, does not belong to the genre of the modern fairytale and is aimed at somewhat older children. It's an adventure story set in a district

of newly-built villas close to the capital city. It's called *The Mystery of the Black Courtyard*, issued by Trio Publishing. Naturally, I am not abandoning my beloved fairytale genre: for next year I'm preparing a book about my cat Leonardo. So, following on from *Puss on Skates*, this'll be a new story about the creature with whiskers and little tail.

• **Dušan Zupka:** *From the younger generation of children's authors in Slovakia, could you tell us who you think does the finest work?*

– **Ján Uličiansky:** That's a difficult question indeed. But anyhow, personally I always look forward to any new book that Peter Karpinský produces for children. His latest is *Seven Days in the Cellar*.

• **Dušan Zupka:** *What's the quality like in Slovak children's books? Can it bear comparison with the current European trends in this area?*

– **Ján Uličiansky:** Certainly it compares well, especially in terms of the quality of illustrations, and here I'm speaking of the rising, or basically already established generation of Slovak illustrators. To make comparisons in the textual field is difficult, because as yet there is not much interest in translating our children's books into world languages, and so even our best books find it difficult to make the breakthrough to an international context.

• *Thank you for the interview!*

Dušan Zupka

Translated by **John Minahane**



Daniel Hevier

Christmas Post

(Extract)

Third Letter

Now as before, in other years,
Christmas is flowering sweetly,
and everybody wants to touch
what's passing by so fleetly.

All the shop windows yell at us,
the screaming ads and slogans.
We push our way to the head of the
queue
with nasty elbow-pokings.

For weeks we're angry with
ourselves,
then afterwards we're cheerful:

we think, "Well, no one's hungry
now
and all have got their needful."

"If someone failed to get their
share,
it's their own fault, they're lazy!"
It seems we live behind thick glass,
stuffing ourselves like crazy.

They play the same old tune for us,
we hear it every winter.
We drip with honey, sticky-
thumbed,
and still in gloomy temper.

Children, I'll tell you how I once
came out from such a Christmas.
I went just following my nose,
heading towards the distance.

Night fell, and soon I met That lad
beyond the city boundary.
You'd call him more a *little lad*.
He was just walking round there.

And so I asked him, "Well, my lad,
perhaps you've lost your way,
then?"

He stood in silence for a while.
"You," he asked, "are you straying?"

DANIEL HEVIER (1955),

poet, writer, dramaturge, translator, journalist, lyricist and illustrator. His first venture into children's literature was the poetry collection *Dancing Birds* (*Vtáci v tanci*, 1978). A second volume of children's poetry, *Don't Stick Your Tongue Out at the Lion* (*Nevyplazuj jazyk na leva*), followed in 1982, imaginatively using the structure of a circus show as its main compositional principle. Hevier also applied the principle of play in his later collections of children's poetry by using dreamlike grotesques (*Wonderland/ Krajina Zázračno*, 1983), which extended to the book's inventive typography and illustrations. In 1986 Hevier's children's fiction *Where The Ice-Cream-Men Go For Winter* (*Kam chodia na zimu zmrzlinári*, 1984) was entered in the IBBY Honour List. His collection *Wordfun* (*Hovorniček*, 1992), is a book that gently guides children towards the correct pronunciation of words and sounds by using language in an inventive and entertaining way.



Photo © Author's Archive

The poems and humorous prose texts in *Slipper Football* (*Futbal s papučou*, 1989), were aimed at helping children who are about to start school to adapt to their new environment and overcome inhibitions. *The Spookier. The Anti-Spook Book for (Non) Fearful Kids* (*Strašidelník, protistrašidelná knižka pre (ne)bojácne deti*, 1999), a collection of prose and verse, is an original reflection on the

phenomenon of fear, and aims to achieve a psychotherapeutic effect. Hevier's fiction, *GURD Country* (*Krajina AGORD*, 2001), deals with the current issue of drug addiction, using the fantasy genre as its vehicle. In 2002 this book received the IBBY Honour List Diploma. With his *Grade F for Boredom* (*Päťka z nudy*, 2005), Hevier offers a collection of song lyrics, poems and short fiction in the form of imaginary and pretend statements commenting on the world of contemporary children. Among his recent publications for children stands out the epic poem *Christmas Post* (*Vianočná pošta*, 2011), about the secrets of Christmas and how modern man is no longer able to perceive the real meaning of this holiday. Freshly from the printers comes a "fairy tale for adults", *How to Photograph Wind* (*Ako sa fotografuje vietor*, 2012), illustrated by the author. In 1994 Hevier received the Triple Rose Award for his writing for children and young readers.

*“Hevier’s creative imagination,
intelligent humour and playfulness
were aimed at stimulating the
child’s mental development.”
Zuzana Stanislavová*

“No, I’m not anyone’s lost boy.
I look for human beings.
It’s cost me lots of energy,
roaming the world and seeking.”

“No one has time for strange kids
now,”
I said; the lad responded,
“What is it that you hope to find?
Full pockets – that’s what’s wanted!

You’re changing into hamsters
now,
you say: Come, let’s go grubbing!
You seek a warm and comfy place,
the weak ones get a drubbing.

And then you sigh, you deeply
sigh...
you don’t know what a dream is!
And you’ve forgotten stars and
wells,
the silence and the clearness.

You have no sky above your heads,
only the screen-sky flickers.
A human’s seen from time to time
beyond the frame of the pictures.

When snowflakes break upon the
earth,
who now feels full of sorrow?”
I interrupted: “Hold a while,
your words are wise, good fellow.

Our world is complicated now,
all things are in disorder,
and rogues and cheats lurk
everywhere:
we’re hit from every quarter.

You’re good? Then times are bad
for you!,
Good deeds are out of fashion!
A box on the ear is all you’ll get:
yes, that’s the world’s new pattern.

The kids in kindergarten play
at kidnappings and shoot-outs.
And even first-years smoke, they
say.
– Joy is a thing we root out.”

Then I felt sorry for myself,
and the hot tears came surging.
And the lad gripped me in embrace,
and “fear no more!” he urged me.

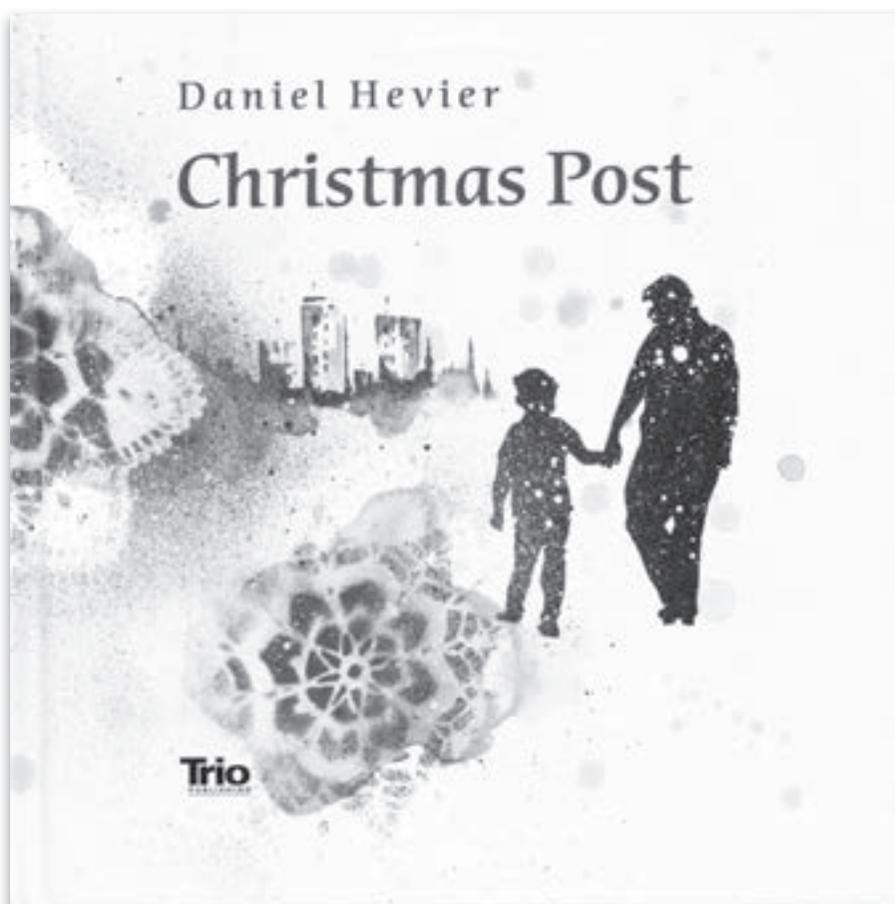
“For that’s why Christmastime
comes round,
calling both good and wicked,
so all that’s sometimes tangled up
once more can be unknitted.”

And now I’ll let you know his name:

“Who are you, lad?” I asked him.
And “I am Jesus,” he replied,
and vanished in the darkness.

Of all the postcard Jesuses
there’s only one that’s true.
The lad who walked through the
dark night,
perhaps he’ll stop for you.

Translated by **John Minahane**
The book *Christmas Post* (Vianočná
pošta) was published by Trio
Publishing, Bratislava, 2011.



Erik Jakob Groch

DER FLÖTER

(Leseprobe)

Es war einmal ein Mensch. Er war ganz nackt, ging immer der Nase nach und flötete immer dasselbe Lied.

Und wenn ihn irgendjemand traf, fragte der ihn gleich: Warum ziehst du dich denn nicht an?

„Das ist mir nie in den Sinn gekommen,“ antwortete der Mensch.

„Und wohin gehst du?“ fragten sie ihn.

„Ich weiß nicht,“ antwortete der Mensch.

„Und warum flötetest du immer dasselbe Lied?“ fragten sie ihn immer wieder.

„Ich habe nie darüber nachgedacht,“ sagte der Mensch.

Und er flötete weiter.

Eines Tages kam er an einen Ort und an dem Ort war eine Wiese und mitten auf der Wiese saßen Engel. Sie hatten riesige schneeweiße Flügel.

Der Mensch setzte sich hin und schaute den Engeln zu.

„Mir sind die Flügel gewachsen, weil ich ein sehr Guter war,“ sagte ein Engel.

In diesem Moment wurden seine Flügel etwas gelb.

„Und mir sind die Flügel gewachsen, weil ich sehr genügsam war,“ sagte ein anderer Engel.

Doch als er das sagte, wurden auch seine Flügel dunkler und gelblich.

„Also mir sind die Flügel gewachsen, weil ich sehr leise war,“ lobte sich selbst ein weiterer Engel.

In diesem Augenblick waren seine Flügel hässlich und dunkel wie die anderen.

Den ganzen Tag lang lobten sich die Engel selbst und ihre Flügel wurden immer dunkler und gelblicher und kleiner.

Der Mensch sah den Engeln zu, doch er dachte nicht darüber nach. Er stand auf, nahm die Flöte und ging seiner Nase nach. Und selbst als er zum Fuße eines hohen Berges gelangte, kam ihm nicht in den Sinn anzuhalten. Er schritt nur weiter, flötete und stieg hinauf, bis er plötzlich ganz oben war, auf dem Gipfel des Berges.

Doch weil er nie darüber nachdachte, stieg er weiter hinauf.

Übersetzt von **Andrea Reynolds**
Das Buch *Der Flöter* (Píšťalkár) erschien
im OZ Slniečkovo,
Prešov, 2006.

THE PIPER

(Extract)

Once there was a man.

Quite naked, he followed his nose
and played the same tune on his pipe.

But when somebody met him,
at once they would ask:

“Why don’t you put on some clothes?”

“It’s never occurred to me,”

was the man’s reply.

“And where are you going?” they asked him.

“I don’t know,” said the man.

“And why do you keep playing the same tune?”

again and again they inquired.

“I’ve never thought about it,”

said the man.

And he went on playing his pipe.

One day he came to a place
where there was a meadow,
and angels with huge wings
as white as snow were sitting
in the middle of the meadow.
The man sat down in the grass
and gazed at the angels.

“I’ve grown wings
because I was very good,”
said one angel.

And at that moment
his wings turned a little yellow.

“And I’ve grown wings
because I was very modest,”
said another angel.
But no sooner had he said this
than his wings, too, turned dark and yellow.

“And the reason why I have wings
is that I was very quiet,”
boasted another angel.
In an instant his wings
were as ugly and dark as the others.

The whole day the angels
sang their own praises
and their wings grew darker
and yellower and smaller.

The man looked at the angels
with no thoughts in his mind.
He just got up, took his pipe

*Das erfolgreiche Buch von Erik Jakob Groch *Der Flöter (Píšťalkár)* erwarb im Jahre 2008 das Diplom der Ehrenliste von IBBY für das literarische Werk. Im Jahre 2006 im Wettbewerb Die schönsten Bücher der Slowakei erwarb Jana Kiselová-Siteková für die Illustrationen zu diesem Buch den Preis des Kulturministeriums der Slowakischen Republik und der Verlag Slniečkovo den Bibiana-Preis für das schönste Kinderbuch.*

and set out, following his nose.
When he came to the foot
of a high hill covered in trees,
it didn't even occur to him to stop.
He just walked on, playing his pipe
and climbing until suddenly
he found himself right at the top.
But because he never thought about it,
he went on climbing, up and on.

Translated by **Heather Trebatická**



GROCH, ERIK JAKUB (1957), Dichter, Schriftsteller, Dramatiker, Kinder- und Jugendbuchautor, wirkte bis 1989 im Underground-Kultur- und Literaturleben von Košice. Im November 1989 war er aktives Mitglied des Bürgerforums (Občianske fórum) in Košice. 1992 gründete er seinen eigenen Verlag, der später Knižná dielňa Timotej genannt wurde. Bis jetzt sind in der Slowakei von Groch 10 Gedichtbände und 3 sehr originelle Kinderbücher erschienen. Sein erster Gedichtband hieß *Privatstunden der Trauer* (Súkromné hodiny smútku, 1989). Bereits mit diesem Band hat Groch Aufmerksamkeit erregt: er schreibt mehrdeutige, auch meditative Poesie, in der viel Geheimnis steckt und die sich bis ins Mythische streckt. Er bemüht sich um eine „kulturelle Archäologie“ der Menschheitsgeschichte und befasst sich mit mythologischen und religiösen

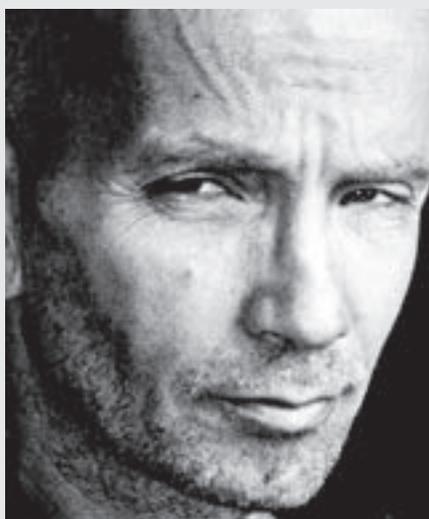


Foto © Gabriel Bodnár

bis hin zu modernen Zivilisationsaspekten. Zu seinen weiteren Werken gehören: *Baba Jaga: Klagelieder* (Baba Jaga: Žalospěvy, 1991), *Die Bruderschwester* (Bratsestra 1992), *Das* (To 2000), *L'acinéma* (L'acinéma, 2001), *Die zweite Naivität* (Druhá naivita, 2005), *Em* (Em, 2006), *Infinity*

(Infinity, 2008), *Flügelschlag. 42 slowakische Haikus* (Mávnutie krídel. 42 slovenských haiku, 2011; Haikus von 11 slowakischen Dichtern). Er akzentuiert vor allem die dringende Notwendigkeit nach Verständnis unter den Menschen, nach Liebe. Groch unterstreicht die gute Beziehung zu allem Lebendigen, was den Menschen umgibt. Seine Kinderbücher *Der kleine Streuner und Klara* (Tuláčik a Klára, 2002), *Der Pfeifenspieler* (Píšťalkár, 2006), *Abe, Aha & Co.* (Ábé, Aha a spol., 2009) sind absolut originell und wurden – wie auch die Rundfunkzyklen seiner Märchen – zu einem kulturellen Ereignis. Die Lyrik, Prosa sowie Kinder- und Jugendliteratur von Erik Jakob Groch gehört zum Interessantesten, was es heutzutage in der slowakischen Literaturszene der mittleren Generation gibt.

Roman Brat

SECOND SERVE

(Extract)

Mornings are like in prison. A cruel awakening to reality. Gradually I open my eyes, timidly, almost with distaste, and the friendly darkness departs. Darkness is certainty, darkness is peace. Light is the enemy, because the rays of daylight bring strange feelings with them. And I've no idea how to cope with those!

I leave the room, and my father as always is preparing breakfast. For whatever reason, he smiles at me; I simply don't understand his morning optimism. I sit at the table and try for at least a moment to sink back into sleep, to savour the last remnant's of the night's sluggish relief.

– How did you sleep? – Dad asks.

– Not much, – I reply. – I'd prefer to go back to bed.

He keeps on smiling. What does he find funny? That I'm haggard and sleepless; that once again I'm going to apply myself to things that don't interest me?

– Today you're training with Bielik. That'll be a different story; be prepared!

Dad's been rehashing this for over a month. It's getting on my nerves. Of course, Hagara's a loser and isn't able any more for the older pupils. Of course, Bielik is real class, he trains the elite. But I'm not going to go crazy over that.

– Well, certainly, – I imitate my father's favourite word combination.

He hasn't noticed my irony. He's looking at me with his inscrutable dark eyes, and he's preparing to package words of praise and admiration directed at my new trainer. He bites into a ham roll and, with his mouth full, declares that Bielik accepted me in the group principally because I've got potential. An awful word. It's like having a strange disease. Yes, indeed! That wasn't Dad's first time using it. When he's enthusiastic about anything, he tends to repeat himself. Evidently because he wants to savour the state of affairs or the circumstance that made him happy. That I've got potential, I'd learned that much a long time ago. Straight away when I first took up tennis. Of course,

I didn't know what it was. What five-year-old would know a word like that? Rather, I sensed that I've got something in me that makes me able to go for training sessions and to play. When I started, I was proud that I had potential.

– Bielik says you must work on your conditioning, otherwise you're not doing badly. And that's a big deal, do you understand? If you think about it, quite obviously he has no reservations about your strokes, he reckons you're technically good.

Once again Dad is telling fables. That's the only word to describe it. I learned the word from Mama, when she was still alive. Jokingly, she used to declare that Dad was telling fables, which is to say, he was inclined to use flowery language and to invent things. If I had been technically faultless, he wouldn't have needed to go to Bielik to beg him to take me into the team. Bielik himself would have noticed and made contact. That's what he did in Janko Kacer's case, or Patrik Hlina's. He literally filched both of them from Hagara, without so much as asking. But he hadn't even stumbled upon me.

– Well, certainly!

Even now, Dad doesn't catch the irony in my voice. Once again he is dreaming his dream about his successful tennis-playing son, in whom he has invested – as he keeps repeating for years on end – an

"Suddenly, in a shrill and determined voice he commands us to warm up with a hundred knee-bends, fifty sit-ups, and thirty press-ups. Dad has turned about and he's going away. I follow him with my gaze, as if seeking support from him: Dad, you can see for yourself what he wants from us. This isn't about tennis, this is galley slavery!"

exceptional quantity of time and an even greater quantity of money. You should appreciate it, Michal. Do you know what other lads would give for that? I do appreciate it, Dad, just don't repeat it to me any more! I'm not as avid for tennis as you are. I play because I have to. My head won't let go. Since I was a little kid you've been drumming it into me what a marvellous game it is, what a talent I am, how healthy I'll be from all that movement, and last but not least I'll make money too... At first I believed you: it was something new and exciting. Training sessions, matches, targets, tournaments. Your yells actually motivated me and your reproaches didn't bother me. But the older I get, the more I've come to realise that this path isn't mine, Dad. I've told you that many times, and you've rolled your eyes at me, as if you'd seen an apparition, and declared that to end a career with so much potential would be a sin, I must not forget that, because when you're halfway there to go back to some new beginning is plain absurdity. I don't know if it's all that absurd. I'm tired of it all. Day after day getting up at dawn, soullessly battering a ball, then afterwards school, school duties, and again training... I'm fed up to the teeth with it. I don't want to any more. Other fellows are going to see girls, for beer, to the cinema. Where do I go?

– You'll see, Bielik will get you in tip-top shape, and in a few months you'll be number one, – Dad gazes at me and waits for me to show enthusiasm about him chaffing me.

With Bielik I'm going to sweat blood. I talked to Paťo Hlina. Seems he's brutal. Not that he yells

or hurls insults: Bielik is as cold and hard as an American paratrooper. He keeps a stopwatch in his hand, and whoever isn't able to do thirty press-ups a minute during exercises has to do five rounds extra in the final run. Press-ups, sit-ups, run, press-ups, sit-ups, run... Bielik is a fanatic for conditioning. He won't tolerate a tennis player who can't slog it out on the court for five hours. Tennis isn't for weaklings, he keeps on saying in his level, cool tone.

– With Hagara, at least we played. Bielik will turn us into machines, – I objected.

– That may be, but he gets results. Everyone in his team has achieved something.

Dad is looking through the window, and quite certainly he can see me out there, lifting a polished trophy (thanks to Bielik) over my head and thanking the fantastic public in English for their warm encouragement in this exceptionally well-run tournament. Dad smiles and suddenly he turns to me and comes over to me and says:

– Don't be afraid, we'll do this together.

Dad isn't a bad fellow. It's just a pity that Mama left us. I think he misses her. I miss her too, just that neither of us will admit it. We play at being hard fellows, who are afraid to shed a tear when remembering Mama. What I wouldn't give for it, if Mama could be here now! Certainly she'd say to Dad: Ah but, Samko, there are other things in life too, besides sport. Don't force him. Except that she isn't here and she can't say that to him.

I pack my lunch for school, throw the bag on my back, shoulder my racquets and follow Dad to the car. The roads are half-empty, people are still only

ROMAN BRAT (1957)

writer, translator, author of numerous works for children and young adults and teenagers. His books *Stubborn Mutton* (*Tvrdohlavý baran*, 2000), *My Angel Knows how to Fight* (*Môj anjel sa vie biť*, 2007), *Confused Twins from Dead-end Road* (*Zmätené dvojčičky zo slepej uličky*, 2008, written together with Gabriela Futová), *Battlefield* (*Mordovisko. Bláznivé príbehy zo školy a okolia*, 2009), *Boys Fell from Strawberry*, *Girls from the Cherry Tree* (*Chlapci padli z jahody, dievčatá z višne*, 2010, written together with Gabriela Futová), *The Horses Are Playing Too* (*Aj kone sa hrajú*, 2010) always transmit some omnipresent values. They deal with real issues of children's and



Photo © Jena Šimková

young adults' lives and try to describe the difficulties of relations within families, among friends or between people and animals. Brat's latest book,

Second serve (*Druhé podanie*, 2012), describes how the unreal and unhealthy expectations of parents can lead their children into complicated situations, leading them towards reaching for drugs and alcohol instead of a better solution.

Among Brat's prose work for adults one can find the books *Escape to Paradise* (*Útek do raja*, 2002), *Pasodoble with Phantoms* (*Pasodoble s príznakmi*, 2007), and *Miramar Ltd.* (*Miramar, s.r.o.*, 2010). Roman Brat has also written numerous radio plays and scripts and has translated books from Spanish. He won the prize for best children's book in 2008, the IBBY and Bibiana awards for best book for children in 2001 and 2007, and has won many others.

waking up. I shiver with cold in the car.

– Shall I put the heating on? – Dad asks, gaping at me in the rear-view mirror.

– No need, – I whisper, and I look out the window.

A jagged sun illuminates road and driver. Dad dons his sunglasses and turns the radio on. I am thinking of Monika. I'm thinking how I'd like to meet her and ask her to the cinema. But how, when it's not possible?

– Dad, how about if we didn't go to Piešťany on Saturday? – I try to suggest a change of plan.

– Are you mad? That camp is very important for us, the elite of Slovakia will be there!

I shut up, because I know I'll never persuade him. So I won't invite Monika this weekend either. My jaws stiffen. With anger, with grief, with helplessness. The car turns off towards the court. Parents are standing by their cars in the adjacent carpark and helping their tennis hopefuls to pack tennis holdalls with three, four, five racquets. The more racquets, the bigger the holdall. The bigger the holdall, the more important the player. I've got my holdall, like a bundle of hay in those pictures by the old Slovak painters. Mama showed me some of them in the atelier, when I went to watch her painting. She leafed through books, and just by the way threw in the remark that this motif is often repeated in our painters' works.

The courts are empty. Bielik is standing in the middle of a stretch of asphalt where seven or eight mattresses are laid out. All of us automatically make towards him. We put down our bags and strip off our tracksuits. Bielik nods towards the mattresses. We approach them and wait. Suddenly, in a shrill and determined voice he commands us to warm up with a hundred knee-bends, fifty sit-ups, and thirty press-ups. Dad has turned about and he's going away. I follow him with my gaze, as if seeking support from him: Dad, you can see for yourself what he wants from us. This isn't about tennis, this is galley slavery! I start on the knee-bends. Mechanically I go down and up again, down and up again... In spirit I'm absent. I'm thinking of Monika and imagining that God will send a flood to Piešťany and that the camp will be called off. There'll be no training, no testing tournament, no cretinous ball-banging. There'll be a mobile in my hand, there'll be Monika's voice, there'll be her joyful agreement to the date, afterwards the cinema, the film, darkness, maybe holding hands, the scent of her hair, in the dusk the profile of her face and the blissful feeling that this was what I longed for and my longing had been fulfilled.

– Faster, faster, – I hear Bielik's voice, dragging me out of my reverie. – You're slow, Mišo, slog at it, slog!

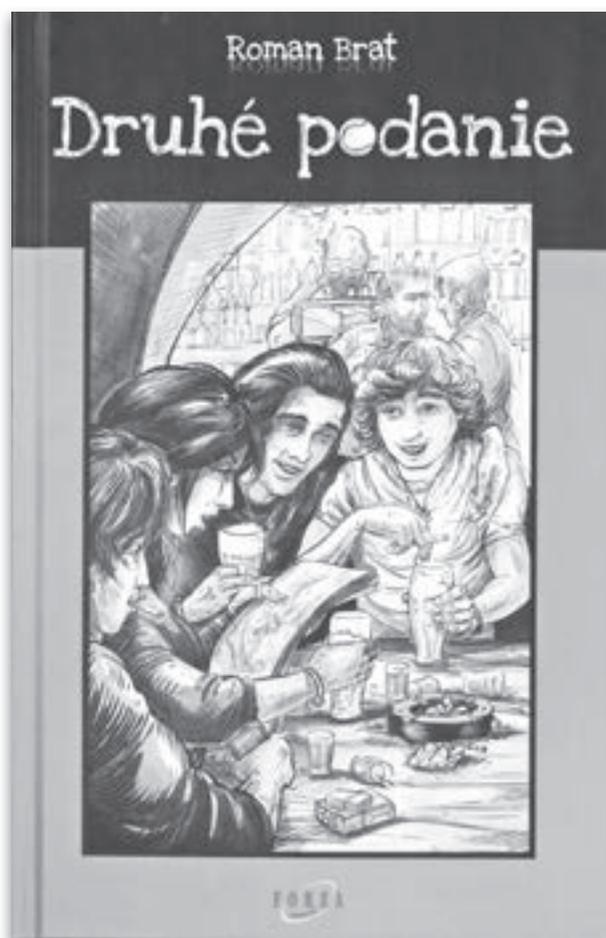
I speed up the knee-bends and the faster I do them, the less I'm able to return in thought to the dusk of the cinema, where a moment ago I was

holding Monika's hand and for several minutes I had dared to kiss her. But I'm not going to be kissing her. At least, not now. I gasp for breath, and the one thing that comes to my mind in the course of that senseless movement is to become invisible and clear off out of here.

Translated by **John Minahane**

The book *Second Serve* (Druhé podanie) was published by Forza Music, Bratislava, 2012.

"Dad isn't a bad fellow. It's just a pity that Mama left us. I think he misses her. I miss her too, just that neither of us will admit it. We play at being hard fellows, who are afraid to shed a tear when remembering Mama."



Róbert Beutelhauser

THE BARBARIAN SLAVS

(Extract)

The Frightful Avars

A person might suppose that the only thing our Slavs cared about was filling their bellies, but you know what happened to the man who thought...

The Slavs had never been obliged to push the wheelbarrow, unlike that unfortunate fellow, the wheelbarrow's inventor. However, midway through the 6th century the Avars came in upon them, and their comfortable life was over. Not only did they have to pay tribute to these nomads, who spread out their tents across the territory of present-day Hungary, but always in wintertime the Avars used to push right into the Slav villages, and they behaved worse than at home. They ate and drank whatever they found, and along with that they began to bother the Slav girls. No wonder that this infuriated their unwilling hosts, who one day said, "Enough!" and briefly and clearly explained to the dear Avars how one had to behave. And in good French too, or to put it more exactly, in good Frankish.

Bonjour, my dear, most probably you've noticed that I haven't turned up at home for quite some time. On this occasion, unlike in the past, I have not been wandering about, looking for someone to sell your croissants to. I've become a king. Yes, you hear me correctly: I'm a king, and don't forget to pass on the news to all my friends. My subjects call themselves Slavs and they're really perfect little people, just that they're inclined to be bunglers. No doubt you've heard of the dreadful Avars. They

fleeced these Slavs of mine, they even forced the Slavic men to fight for them. When my new friends told me that, I flew into a rage, pounded the table and said: "Are you going to put up with that? Look here, defend yourselves!" They muttered a bit among themselves, and then one of them piped up: "You are right, foreigner. We never thought of that. Wouldn't you like to be our leader?" I didn't need to hear more. You know how I love to fight, and so we began training. After supper I used to visit the other Slavic chieftains; we formed a combination, and at the beginning of winter, when the Avars came, we thrashed them so badly they were scarcely able even to run away. After the victory there was great joy, and guess who was the greatest hero? Yes, your husband Samo, once upon a time a merchant trudging along good roads and bad, today a king! And since it is unthinkable that anyone, even some wife, should insult a king, I will never again return.

*My dear ex-wife, keep well.
Your former husband, now King Samo.*

P.S. If you hadn't been constantly screaming about how you'd made a bad marriage, today you might have been Queen. What a shame!

P.P.S. And lest I forget, my 12 wives send you their greetings.

Empire – non-empire

The history of the Central European Slavs starts with it, but despite that, we don't know where it lay, or what its borders were. What is it?



RÓBERT BEUTELHAUSER (1970),

is a new figure on the Slovak literary scene. After his studies of history and Slovak language and literature in 1995, he started to teach at the Metodova High-School in Bratislava. He cooperated with the literary section of Slovak Radio. He prepared for them programmes about F. Werfel, D. Tatarka, and Ch. Dickens. Later, Beutelhauser worked as an editor for the Slovart publishing house. The book *Barbarian Slavs* is the first part of his attempt to cover Slovak history for children. The second part will cover the period of the Middle Ages (*From One Defeat to Another*), and the third part will focus on Slovak history from 16th to 18th century.



Photo © Author's Archive

If you can answer the question by saying, “Samo’s Empire”, then your history teacher deserves his pay.

The fact is that everything we know about Samo’s Empire we have learned from the chronicle of the French monk Fredegar. And that’s only because the Franks had been finding the Slavs a serious pain in the neck. More precisely, the Slavs were attacking Frankish merchants, which infuriated their king Dagobert. Therefore, in 631 he sent his envoy Sycharius to negotiate with the Slavic leader Samo, a former Frankish merchant. Their talks proceeded very quickly. Samo smiled and with his innate charm told the envoy to go to blazes.

Needless to say, when Dagobert heard that, he was enraged. He assembled his army and moved right away against the Slavs. At first the Franks won the battles, but afterwards at the capital of Samo’s Empire, the town of Wogastisburg, the tables were turned and the Slavs made short work of their enemies. Naturally, Fredegar doesn’t write very much about that. But one thing is clear – Samo was able to occupy the Slavic throne in peace until the year 658. He died after ruling for 35 years, and the mourners who wept for him included his 12 wives (that bit about the weeping hasn’t been fully confirmed), 22 sons and 15 daughters.

MORAVIA-NITRA NEWS

Success at last! After the Holy Father Nicholas I refused our Rastislav’s request to nominate a local bishop for us, our thoughtful prince turned to His Byzantine Highness Michael III. The latter gave ear to his request and sent us two missionaries from Thessalonika, who will help to educate priests for Moravia-Nitra.

We’ve had enough of German missionaries,

our leader said, when more and more reports of the growing influence of Frankish priests were reaching the prince’s palace. “We didn’t understand a word they said in church, and after Mass they immediately cleared off and went to the Frankish military camps to hatch plots against our beloved prince”, an unnamed high-ranking Slavic chieftain told our correspondent.

Light Comes From Constantinople

Constantine and Methodius, brothers from Thessalonika, have come to instruct our priests. You may say: what of that? We have had such people here before. You are right about this, but these two Byzantines have come with a revolutionary novelty. That is the language, which (for a change) everyone in the church will understand. So there will be no more dozing on Sunday to the sound of Latin. Furthermore, these masters will teach us to write words in this language. The new script will become an instrument of education and for spreading the glory of our principedom. More about that, and about the missionary brothers, will be found in the following interview.

MORAVIA-NITRA NEWS

MNN: What was the journey like?

Methodius: Throughout our lives we’ve done plenty of travelling, but the older we get, the harder it gets for our backsides to take all that bumpy riding on donkeys.

MNN: Can you introduce yourselves to our readers?

Methodius: I’ll begin, then. I’m 12 years older than my brother, we’re two of the five children of a respected Thessalonika family. For our parents it was important that we acquire the best education. I became a lawyer.

Constantine: And I became a philosopher, and also, when circumstances required it, a diplomat and a linguist. And above all, we are both servants of God.

MNN: You have brought to our parts a language of divine worship that the people can understand. Where did you learn our language?

Constantine: I’m sure you know that we come from Thessalonika, where there are Slavs living as well as Greeks. So we’ve used their language, and as regards the script, we’ve used the small Greek alphabet.

MNN: Language and script are important. What was it like translating the Word of God?

Constantine: If God assists you, then it’s beautiful, and he did assist us.

MNN: What are the goals of your mission in Moravia?

Methodius: Above all, we must educate priests, who will spread the faith. Therefore we must establish schools, where all who are interested may learn the faith, the new language and the script.

Thank you for the interview, and we wish you every success in your mission.

Translated by **John Minahane**

The book *The Barbarian Slavs* (Barbarskí Slovania) was published by Slovart, Bratislava, 2012.



Gabriela Futová

THE KIDS IN DETENTION

(Extract)

I grabbed my bag and walked toward the classroom. I would have rather shimmied down the drainpipe. My entrance was met with a deathly silence. I pretended not to notice and sat down in my usual place. Everyone stared at me as if I was a ghost. Including Sisa, even though she'd seen me outside the school.

"What the hell..." someone piped up but at that moment our form teacher came in.

"Wow! This is the quietest reception I've ever had. I can't believe you've finally seen ..." Her eyes fell on me. I expected her to start yelling, perhaps even throw me out of the classroom but she looked away without any reaction. "...the light," she finished the sentence. "Sit down."

I sat down but stayed on my guard, just in case she pounced on me, but nothing happened. The form teacher didn't seem to take any notice of my appearance. She proceeded with the lesson as if there was nothing wrong with the way I looked, as if nothing about me had changed. I had never expected to get away with it so easily. I began to think our form teacher was really quite cool. But the other lessons... The maths teacher asked if it was really me; the physics teacher tested me, claiming he needed to check if it was just my image that had changed or my attitude to studying. Olinka the P.E. teacher didn't really get to see my full attire since for the sports class I had to get rid of the punk gear except, of course, the awesome hairstyle and make-up. History with Machová was the worst. She seemed to relish the chance to give me a piece of her mind, screaming her head off for a full fifteen minutes that the school wouldn't tolerate any trends or tramps, that I was expected to wear appropriate clothes, etc. She didn't scare me all that much seeing as I'd been expecting a huge telling off. I actually managed to zone out and half her tirade just passed me by. That's how I missed the moment when she asked if I understood what had earned me the label dunce. Ouch. Suddenly I realized what it must feel like to be at the receiving end of this kind of tongue-lashing all the time. Machová apparently wanted to savour every last drop of her triumph. She decided to test me about stuff we hadn't done for ages, but I stood my ground. I wasn't going to let her think I'd completely lost my mind. I'd been working really hard in history all year and she had no choice but to give me an A. She must have been seething.

After school it was just us, detention kids.

"You're pretty funny," Mastniak said by way of a welcome. It felt good - for the first time I felt I was in the right place, with people I had something in common with. For once it wasn't my cowardice that was on the

agenda but the day's events. Silva told us that her form teacher had sent her away, convinced she must have got the wrong classroom, and I just smiled. By the time she described how the teacher had thrown her out for the second time, this time from form period, on the grounds that these dealt with internal matters that weren't meant for students of other forms, I was cracking up. Quite a few people were confused by Silva's new look. Poor Kuchár was apparently in such a daze that he kept staring at her and lost the thread of his own lecture whenever he looked at her. I could picture him quite vividly. Silva said Machová hadn't been able to resist making snide remarks but when I told them how she had worked me over it was their turn to stare. Yes, it had definitely been a unique day. It's enough to remember the furious school caretaker running after me as I passed his den in the break. He must have taken me for some dangerous character because he grabbed my shoulder, presumably hoping to save the school from some brazen thief and he couldn't believe it when I turned to face him. I must have made even more of a spectacle of myself than Silva usually did, because even little kids seemed more willing to get out of my way at lunchtime and little schoolgirls stared at me as if they'd seen a real-life she-devil. I stuck my tongue out at them, naturally.

My journey home turned out to be quite an adventure, too. I was very much aware of disgusted glances from people who didn't even know me, and stunned to see how prepared they were to judge someone completely on a first impression. And they didn't even know that this was just a mask I had put on for the day.

"All the excitement had evaporated. An ordinary boring day was ahead and I realized that breaking free of stereotype yesterday was the greatest experience I'd had for years. What a shame it was over. Today even Mum's slap seemed quite exciting. A kind of full stop that put an end to my rebellion. Even if it seemed almost funny to me now."

*"Futová's work responds to children's need for reading that is fun while also using narrative suspense to provide the reader with gentle guidance through the maze of interpersonal relations and their values."
Zuzana Stanislavová*

People stared at me, especially outside my local shop, as if I had some contagious disease, or as if there was a sign on my forehead reading: "Beware: Hobo! Don't touch!" An old woman even spat when she saw me. I asked her if she needed any help, and she crossed herself in horror. It was quite funny, actually.

In the hallway of our block I met a neighbour with her dog. She looked at me and her eyes fell on my neck. As I got into the lift, I overheard her telling her ugly mutt that a dog collar suited it more than me. I didn't think so.

At the entrance to our flat I was welcomed by a slap in the face.

And, at a stroke, my good mood vanished.

Before starting a row, Mum dragged me inside, slamming the door hard. Presumably so that the neighbours wouldn't hear her give me a thrashing. But she didn't lay a hand on me again after that.

"Will you kindly explain yourself?" she said, staring daggers at me. I could see she was livid. That it had cost her a great effort not to give me another slap. And that's what pissed me off. It had been a really long time since my Mum had given me a thrashing. I think the last time it happened was when I was still a little kid and had knocked over an expensive grandfather clock while running around, breaking it into smithereens. Since then I had taken greater care not to break random things and then as I grew older I didn't really give Mum much cause to be angry. And that's exactly why her anger pissed me off today. Because this was the first time I'd done something out of the ordinary, something which I didn't deserve to be slapped in the face for because, after all, I hadn't robbed or beaten up anyone, in fact I hadn't done anything wrong and I had even got an A.

"I've explained already," I snapped and was about to turn around and lock myself in my room but Mum grabbed me by the hand, just like the school caretaker had done before, forcing me to face her.

"Do you really think I'm stupid? I made it very clear this morning that you were not to go to school looking like this, and yet you've slapped all this stuff on and now you're sulking like I've done something to hurt you."

"It was a project," I hissed. "I haven't done anything wrong," I said with tears welling up in my eyes. Because it was so unfair and because I felt so helpless and furious.

"I phoned your form teacher and told her I don't want

you to be involved in projects like this."

I froze. At first I was terrified. Mum had obviously found out I'd been lying, and that astonished me. And then I got really mad at her. Had she gone round the bend? Had she lost it completely? Did she have to discuss my outfit with the form teacher straight away? I felt cheated and betrayed. And it hurt. Because I had just realized that, in spite of everything I had done until now, my Mum didn't trust me at all.

"I hate you," I jerked my hand out of her grip and ran into my room. I really hated her at that moment. But I channelled my anger at the gear. In a rage I got rid of all of Silva's metal rubbish, wrenching the dog collar off so violently I scratched my neck. I stripped off the T-shirt and jeans and kicked them into a corner, and climbed under the blanket wearing just a vest and knickers.

It was so unfair! My cheek was still stinging but that didn't bother me so much. It was Mum's lack of trust that really hurt. I knew I had done something she disapproved of but I honestly didn't think it was such a big deal.

I didn't leave my room at dinnertime either. On my way to school the next morning I returned the dog collar to our neighbour. All the excitement had evaporated. An ordinary boring day was ahead and I realized that breaking free of stereotype yesterday was the greatest experience I'd had for years. What a shame it was over. Today even Mum's slap seemed quite exciting. A kind of full stop that put an end to my rebellion. Even if it seemed almost funny to me now.

During the ten o'clock break I was summoned by my form teacher. I thought she needed some help and went over without thinking anything was amiss.

"Take a seat, Šárka," she said, pointing to an armchair. "Tell me what yesterday was all about."

The form teacher was calm but I got pretty upset.

"Nothing," I replied quietly.

"Excuse me?" the teacher leaned closer to me, as if she thought that would make me spill the beans and confide in her about everything

"Nothing. I've told you, it was just an experiment," I said glancing at her and immediately looked away.

"What kind of experiment? I hear your excuse at home was that it was a school project but I don't know of any teachers who would set this kind of crazy homework."

I was determined to stick to my lies.

"I wanted to know what it's like to suddenly change your image," I said, managing to hold her gaze this time.

*"Futová has a knack for presenting psychologically convincing characters and their family relationships."
Zuzana Stanislavová*

“That’s great, but couldn’t you go about this change of image in some other way? Did you really have to come to school dressed as a scruffy punk?”

I shrugged. I had no intention of explaining how and why I had done it, even though she seemed genuinely concerned about me.

„Šárka, if the detentions are really a problem, I will put in a good word for you. You are one of the best students at our school, I don’t think you belong with those yobs.“

„I don’t want you to sort things out for me... I... I don’t really mind that much, I’ve got used to it.“

„But...“

„Seriously. Thanks, but no thanks.“

My form teacher looked at me as if I had just informed her I was suffering from a mysterious terminal disease.

„You know you can always come to me if you have any problems...“

„Yes, I do,“ I agreed. „Can I go now?“

The teacher nodded and sighed. I shot out of the armchair and as soon as I found myself in the corridor I felt a weight lifting off my chest. God, I would never have thought adults would make such a fuss over my one and only screw-up. On the other hand, I was actually starting to look forward to afternoon detention.

„Everyone’s been talking about it today,“ said Silva, almost unrecognizable with her heavy make-up back on. I don’t know how she did it but the layer of mascara on her eyelashes was as thick as if she’d been piling it on for

a week. Yet she had looked quite normal yesterday.

„What did your parents say?“ I asked, remembering how my mum had boxed my ears.

„They didn’t even notice I looked different. I could have shaved my head and they wouldn’t notice.“

„How do you mean, they didn’t notice? You share the same flat, don’t you?“

„Don’t even go there,“ said Silva, putting a stop to the discussion. „They just wouldn’t.“

Translated by **Julia Sherwood**

The book *The Kids in Detention* (Poškoláci) was published by SPN – Mladé letá, Bratislava, 2010.



GABRIELA FUTOVÁ (1971),

author of children’s books, sets her stories among ordinary families living in ordinary apartment blocks, record the day-to-day world of sibling rivalry, parental interventions, neighbourly relations and children’s fantasies. In her first book of children’s fiction, *Our Mum Is a Witch!* (Naša mama je bosorka!, 2000), the author fuses everyday reality with elements of fantasy. Futová’s next book, *Wanted: A Better Mum* (Hľadám lepšiu mamu, 2001) focuses on a stubborn girl who finds an original solution to the problem of having a single mother who cannot meet all her expectations: over the summer holidays she sets out to find a more tolerant substitute mother. The amusing action of the loose follow-up to this book, *Better a Dad in the Hand Than a Pal in the Bush* (Lepší otec v hrsti ako kamoš na streche, 2005) revolves around the girl’s attempts to find a suitable father and partner for her mother. Futová stresses the comic aspects of single parenthood and



Photo © Author’s Archive

the difficulties involved in finding a new partner, rather than presenting it as a psychological problem. A combination of witty narrative and emphasis on family values is also typical of the author’s later fiction, *Mummy, Don’t Go Round the Bend!* (Nezblázni sa, mamička!), as well as *If I were a Witch* (Keby som bola bosorka, both published in 2003). Her books *Four Bones for Flipper* (Štyri

kosti pre Flipra, 2007) and *Tomcat Red-tail’s School for Dogs* (Psia škola kocúra Červenochvosta, 2008) again demonstrate Futová’s ability to focus on everyday life through the lens of humour. The author creates a fairy-tale atmosphere by narrating the story from a dog’s and cat’s point of view and presenting the world through their animal longings and instincts. This perspective provides rich ground for amusing paradoxes and witty parallels between the worlds of humans and animals. Her recent books have shifted their focus on teenagers. In *You Must Obey Your Brother!* (Brata musíš poslúchať!, 2011) the main hero is a fourteen-year-old boy, Dodo, who has to take care of his little sister who keeps embarrassing him in front of his pals. *The Kids in Detention* (Poškoláci, 2012) brings a story of three nine-grade troublemakers and a top student, Šárka, who fights very hard to keep her best student position and to stand up to those who are constantly provoking her.

Peter Karpinský

SEVEN DAYS IN THE CELLAR

(Extract)

Day One: Waking

That morning Celestine woke up alone. For several minutes he just lay there and observed the dust granules dancing in the sunbeam that was descending through the window into the cellar. After that, he shut his eyes and imagined how wonderful it would be if he were able to fly. He would only have to spread out his arms and... In his fantasies Celestine soared as high as the ceiling and flew about up there happily.

But that morning, as usual, his stomach had woken up together with Celestine, and it was now beginning to demand breakfast. Celestine therefore stuck his nose out of the tuft of cottonwool where he'd been sleeping, and called out: "Mama, I'm up already!"

To Celestine's great surprise, however, Mama did not peep out from behind the big banana box and did not wish him good morning. Was it that she hadn't heard him? So he tried once more: "I'm up already!"

But yet again, nothing happened. Silence reigned in the whole cellar, interrupted only by the gentle murmur of the falling dust.

"Mammy! Eyes!" Celestine shouted, much more loudly. But the cellar still remained empty and desolate. "Aha, you want to play Hide-and-Seek," Celestine said, laughing; he slid out of his cottonwool bed and beat three times on some piece of old junk that was sprawled on the floor. "Hiding or not hiding, here I come!" Then he looked in wardrobes and on shelves, and peeped into all boxes, packages and bags which were stowed away in that part of the cellar where, together with his family and the other dust mites, he lived.

Celestine looked everywhere; he avoided only the dark corner in which He Who Lives in the Corner dwelt. Mama had always warned about him, and Celestine was very

much afraid of him. Even though he had never seen He Who Lives in the Corner, Celestine occasionally glimpsed, in the mysterious twilight where the frightful unknown dwelt, two shining fiery-red eyes.

Celestine avoided that ghastly corner, but otherwise he examined all places, big and small, in the entire surrounding. But there was not even a trace of his parents. Vanished likewise were his aunts and uncles, male and female cousins, grandmas and grandpas. It seems there was not a single dust mite left in the cellar besides Celestine. "That is odd," Celestine thought. "They've never before managed to hide themselves so well. Always I've found them right away at the first attempt. Wherever can they be?" He was thinking of taking another look in the old shoebox, when a little whistling voice disturbed him: "Are you looking for something?"

Celestine turned and looked in the direction that the voice came from. A clothes moth, standing on a nearby shelf, was looking at him.

"Are you looking for something?" Moth repeated her question.

"I am," Celestine nodded.

"And what?" Moth enquired. "What are you looking for?"

"Mama and Dad. They've disappeared," Celestine explained.

"Oh." Moth drew back, disappointed. "I thought you were looking for something important."

"Can anything be more important than Mama and Dad?"

"Of course it can! For example... a tasty little mohair sweater. Although..." Moth paused for a moment. "I'm on a diet, so as not to spoil my figure. You see, I'm a model. A very well-known model."

"Well-known?" Celestine asked, surprised, because he didn't know Moth at all.

"Yes, indeed. Well-known and famous. People literally adore me. Not long ago, when I appeared in a certain flat, all of them leaped out of their armchairs, ran round the whole room after me and clapped me enthusiastically," she boasted, and spread her dimly glittering wings out wide. Several times she flapped them, as if preparing to fly.

"But..." Celestine wanted to make some objection, but Moth interrupted him: "But? But what? Do you actually doubt my words? You don't believe that I'm famous?"

"No, I do, I believe you. But I still think that Mama and Dad are the most important in the world."

"When Celestine looked at them more closely, he understood why the first one had seemed strange to him. None of the cobwebs displayed looked like an ordinary spider's web. These were much more beautiful, because they had pictures of flowers, butterflies, dancing dust mites and fairytale landscapes knitted into them."

"Pch," she snorted, "the most important... It's plain how little you know of the world. Look at me. I'm splendid, what? Those golden wings! That elegance! Have you ever seen anything more beautiful? Of course you haven't. I'm perfect. I'm a star. And yet I never knew my parents. First, I was lying all on my own in a tasteful woollen costume, and afterwards, and I emphasise, all on my own once again, I became what I am. The most beautiful butterfly in the entire cellar!" Moth looked contemptuously at Celestine. "Do you still think that parents are the most important in the world?"

"I... I... don't know," Celestine stammered, and finally began to understand why his mother had always said that the clothes moths were odd.

"Naturally, you don't know." Moth nodded importantly. "After all, you're a common dust mite. And dust mites are frightfully primitive. Now, someone who spends the whole day eating dust, how could he understand such complex things as life and fashion?"

For a moment, Moth reflected on the profundity of her words, then she spread her wings again and rose into the air with dignity. "Excuse me, but I must go. I have to meet my agent. He wants to offer me an engagement in a certain world-famous fashion show. You know, I love clothes! I absolutely devour them..."

"Wait, haven't you seen my parents anywhere?" Celestine shouted after Moth as she flew off, but she no longer heard him, because she was gracefully disappearing in the cellar's dusk. All that remained of her was the scent of expensive perfume in the air.

Celestine felt lonely. Once again he tried to survey all the places where his relatives might be hiding, but again he found nothing. It was strange, how all of them had gone and left him here alone. "But why?" Celestine asked in his own mind. "Have I been bad? Was I not obedient? Or don't they like me any more?" He didn't understand it. "Why have they left me? How could they...?" Desperation began to overwhelm him, and as if that were not enough, his stomach was persistently and urgently telling him that he still hadn't eaten and he was terribly hungry. "It's

definitely lunch-time by now," Celestine thought, and at that moment he remembered the fantastic dumplings that his mother baked from the most delicate dust and which surely at that very moment she would have laid on the dining table. But Mama had vanished. She had abandoned him, without leaving him even a crust of dust bread. Celestine was so hungry he would have eaten old cobwebs if he'd found any.

To satisfy his rumbling stomach, he took a whole handful of dustgrains from the shelf and stuffed them into his mouth. They didn't taste as well as Mama's, but his stomach at least stopped groaning for a while.

Always when Celestine was sad, he used to retreat into the box of Christmas decorations that people had put away in the cellar. He dug right in among the glittering garlands and let himself be lulled to sleep by the mysterious and magical perfume of Christmas. Today he'd have done the same, but the flashing tinsel brought him no relief. On the contrary, when he noticed it he remembered how he used to sit with Mama and Dad, and together they laughed at the grimaces leering out at them from the bulged mirrors of the tinsel balls. Celestine couldn't stand it any more and burst out crying. Dad had told him, admittedly, that big lads don't cry, but Celestine wasn't a big lad, he was only a frightened boy who had lost his parents.

He cried a long time, till in the end, fatigued, he fell asleep. He dreamed of Mama and Dad. They were standing beside him, but suddenly they began to melt away. They were vanishing like smoke from an extinguished candle. Mama stretched out her hands to him and cried: "Help! Help!" At that moment Celestine started and woke up. He listened. That call for help had seemed incredibly real to him. And indeed, it wasn't long before the cry sounded again: "Help! Help!" It was coming from somewhere on the upper shelves.

"Mama? Dad? I'm coming!" Celestine called, quickly climbing out of the box of Christmas decorations and running towards the voice. He was a while making his way through the clutter that was heaped in the cellar and filled it

Peter Karpinský (1971),

writer, university lecturer and literary critic. His first book, a collection of short stories, *Tippy-tapping with Tip-Tap* (Ako sme s Ťuktukom ťuktukovali, 2001), speaks about communication, loneliness, the problem of human existence and the grey stereotypes of everyday life. He proposes solutions as to how to turn these into something special. His second book, *Tales from the Museum of Mysteries and Secrets* (Rozprávky z múzea záhad a tajomstiev, 2007), includes stories full of mystery, suspense and detective investigation. Karpinský won the Literary Fund Prize for this in 2007.



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In 2011 he published his latest work, *Seven Days in a Cellar* (Sedem dní v pivnici). This book, marvellously

illustrated by Zuzana Bočková Bruncková, presents the adventurous lives of small creatures who occupy the shadowy and unknown world of an old house's cellar.

Karpinský has also written books for adults. The first appeared in 1998 with the title *We Inform All the Owners of Graves* (Oznamujeme všetkým majiteľom hrobov 1998), and was followed by *No-Assumption* (Nanebonevzatie, 2009). He is also the editor of the latest anthology of contemporary Slovak prose *5x5* (5x5, 2011). Alongside his literary writing Karpinský often takes part in various literary juries and writes critiques.

almost to the ceiling. He had to crawl along the bits of damaged furniture, non-functioning televisions, broken window-frames and glass, all the things that people had put away, in hopes that at some future time they would still be needed. At one moment he risked having a heap of old newspapers collapse on him. Immediately after that it seemed he was going to fall into an enormous pot, while he was trying to cross over it with the aerial of an old radio as his slender bridge. Nevertheless, finally he was able to reach the place from which the desperate cry came unceasingly: "Help! Help!" Impatiently he pushed aside a pile of dirty rags and was about to fling himself into his parents' embrace, but what he saw fixed him to the spot. Some sort of strange cobweb was hanging on the wall before him. Celestine had no time to think why that cobweb seemed strange to him: his eyes immediately fell on the clothes moth, who was hopelessly struggling in its mesh.

"At last!" Moth said joyfully, when she noticed Celestine. "Free me quickly!"

"But how?" Celestine asked helplessly.

"Easy! Rip the threads!" Moth instructed him.

"That can be done," Celestine nodded, and already he was preparing to tear the first strand of that strange cobweb, when an unknown, rough voice stopped him: "Don't even think of it!"

Celestine looked round. Oooh! Close behind him stood an enormous spider, glaring furiously at him with his many eyes. "Don't even think of it!" the spider repeated forcefully, and added: "I worked all night on it."

"On what?" Celestine asked, bewildered.

"On my work of art, of course," the spider explained.

"On what work?" Celestine didn't understand, because Moth, trapped in the web, had again begun wailing hysterically.

"Ahh!" The spider clasped his head with his forelegs. "One more art ignoramus. Have you never yet heard of a work of art?"

"Of course I have," Celestine said defensively. "A work of art is when, if... well, it's when..." He dried up, and the spider sighed again. "I suppose it'll be best if I show you a work of art. This one, for example."

"This?" Celestine looked, surprised, at the torn webwork, where Moth, wailing, was still fluttering.

"No! That work of art is ruined. But if you look round you..."

Celestine did as the spider advised, and he was almost struck dumb with amazement. All around, every free space was covered in cobwebs. But not any old sort. When Celestine looked at them more closely, he understood why the first one had seemed strange to him. None of the cobwebs displayed looked like an ordinary spider's web. These were much more beautiful, because they had pictures of flowers, butterflies, dancing dust mites and fairytale landscapes knitted into them.

"To satisfy his rumbling stomach, he took a whole handful of dustgrains from the shelf and stuffed them into his mouth. They didn't taste as well as Mama's, but his stomach at least stopped groaning for a while."

"That's beautiful," Celestine stammered. "Marvellous! How did you...?"

The spider thrust out his head and breast proudly. "Simple. Once I found a magazine about knitting among the old newspapers. I liked it, and so I had a go myself. At first it was very difficult. Try knitting, when you've got eight legs! I was always mixing things up – instead of plain I did purl, and when I wanted to cast on I cast off. But eventually I mastered it." The spider smiled contentedly at Celestine. "I'm glad you like the webs. Because they didn't please the other spiders. They said they were shocking. According to them, all webs must be identical. But I am an artist, I cannot make identical things. Every work of mine must be original."

While the spider was speaking, Celestine again and again admired his knitted webs. They were truly wonderful. "A pity that Mama and Dad aren't here, they'd certainly like it too," the thought struck him, and immediately tears came to his eyes.

"What's the matter?" asked the spider, disturbed. "Is there something you dislike in my works of art?"

"No, not at all," Celestine reassured him. "Your webs are perfect. But I remembered my parents. This morning they disappeared. You haven't seen them, by any chance?"

The spider thought for a moment. "Do you know, maybe I did see them! Last night, while I was knitting by the romantic light of the moon, I noticed a little group of dust mites. Maybe they were your relatives."

"Certainly they were! No other dust mites live here," Celestine cried, feeling his spirits lift. "Where did they go?"

"Well, to put it... They didn't go anywhere. They were taken away."

Translated by **John Minahane**

The book *Seven Days in the Cellar* (Sedem dní v pivnici) was published by Perfekt, Bratislava, 2011.



Anežka Szabóová

DER BLAUE HIMMEL

(Leseprobe)

13. April – Mittwoch – 2. Stunde – Physik

NEIN! Ich will und werde nicht zu Oma gehen! NEIN! Meine Eltern können mich nicht zwingen, dort hinzuziehen. Dazu haben sie kein Recht. Vielleicht bin ich erst sechzehn, aber ich weiß, was sich Eltern erlauben können und was nicht. Eines meiner innersten Gesetze sagt ganz klar, dass niemand das Recht hat, irgendeinen Menschen einzusperren. Genau das sind sie nämlich gerade im Begriff zu tun. Sie wollen mich ins Gefängnis zu Oma schicken.

Wovon spricht dieser Lehrer da? Und warum hat er heute wieder eine Streifenkrawatte um? Der Typ weiß wirklich nicht, was man im derzeitigen Modezeitalter trägt. Er sollte im Fremdwörterbuch nach dem Begriff Mode suchen.

Ich muss aufhören. Der Nacken tut mir weh. Unter der Bank auf den Knien zu schreiben ist überhaupt nicht angenehm und noch dazu besteht hier die große Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass der große Mann an der Tafel es merkt und dann kann ich den Mond anheulen. Und bekämen es auch noch meine Freundinnen mit, dann würden sie mich bestimmt aus der Clique werfen. Sie finden es kindisch, alles ins Tagebuch zu schreiben. Nur dass ich es besser finde, als ein Glätteisen. (Ich persönlich benutze es nicht.) Ich muss wirklich aufhören. Zlatka dreht sich gerade um und der Physiker ist offenbar dabei auszufragen.

13. April – Mittwoch – 5. Stunde – Informatik

In Physik hat mich dieser entsetzliche Mensch mit der entsetzlichen Krawatte um den Hals, an welcher er sich nicht aufhängen würde, nicht einmal, wenn er es unbedingt wollte, ausgefragt. Ich habe eine Vier bekommen. Martin hätte sich mehr anstrengen und besser einsagen können. Nebenbei, heute hat er wieder dieses Super-T-Shirt mit dem New York-Schriftzug an.

Gestern hat sich Taty einen unglaublichen Nagellack gekauft. Er hat eine wunderschöne rötliche Farbe mit Perlenschimmer. Nach der Schule gehen wir zu ihr, um ihn auszuprobieren. Für morgen passt der perfekt. Dann ist nämlich der TAG DER MODERNEN EXOTIK. Geeignete Kleidung für diesen Tag auszuwählen, lässt mich immer ins Schwitzen geraten.

Und ich weigere mich, zu Oma zu gehen. Ich gedenke nicht, an einem Ort herumzusitzen, an dem

es ein einziges Geschäft gibt und auch dieses nur drei Stunden am Tag geöffnet ist, das Wort Boutique sagt denen nichts und von einem Internetcafé kann ich nur träumen.

Was? Ich soll auf das Koffersymbol klicken? Was ist das denn bitte

13. April – Abends

Es gab kein Treffen mit dem blendenden Lack. Vater hat mich angerufen, ich möge nach der Schule schnurstracks nach Hause kommen, weil Mama irgendetwas erledigen und ich als große Schwester auf diese kleine Rotznase Samko aufpassen muss. Was kann schlimmer sein als das? Der TAG DER SÜSSEN PUPPEN ist wirklich nicht mein Tag.

Martin hat mich zur Schuldisko immer noch nicht eingeladen. Typisch Mann. Aber wenn er denkt, dass ich bis zum letzten Moment auf ihn warte, dann täuscht er sich gewaltig.

14. April – Donnerstag – 7.50 Uhr

Heute ist der TAG DER MODERNEN EXOTIK. Geeignete Klamotten auszuwählen, war wirklich nicht einfach. Ich musste um sieben aufstehen, was sich nicht gerade günstig auf meinen Teint ausgewirkt hat. Nach reiflicher Überlegung habe ich einen Jeansrock mit gesticktem Palmenmotiv, ein hellbraunes T-Shirt mit Miami-Aufschrift, grobmaschige Strümpfe, braune Stiefel bis unters Knie und ein Kopftuch ausgewählt.

Zu zwei Zöpfen, welche den Eindruck eines schutzbedürftigen Mädchens erwecken (manche Kerle fliegen unserer Statistik nach auf sowas), passt das perfekt. Das Make-up und den XXL-Mascara aufzutragen war einfach, problematisch blieb nur der Lid-schatten, weil mir der Braune so gar nicht steht. Ich musste mir eine Alternative überlegen, so dass ich mich für den Silbernen entschieden, damit er mit der Aufschrift auf meinem T-Shirt zusammenpasst. Dann nur noch Accessoires: große Silberkreolen (Modeschmuck), Armreifen aus der gleichen Serie und einen Anhänger mit Metallseesternen. Beim Anblick im großen Spiegel fiel mir nur ein einziges Wort ein: „VOLLKOMMENHEIT.“

Taty und Zlata mussten einfach wieder einmal zu der Bewertung kommen, dass ich von uns dreien am besten aussehe. Aber bei Martin ist das irgendwie

nicht angekommen. Er sollte mal seine Leitung reparieren. Oder sie gleich ganz austauschen.

14. April – 7. Stunde – Geschichte

Der Level meiner Aufnahmefähigkeit ist auf dem niedrigsten Punkt angelangt und sinkt kontinuierlich. Ich weiß schon nicht mehr genau, was für eine Stunde wir eigentlich haben. Zlatka verfällt gerade in eine tiefe Depression, weil ihr vom kleinen Finger der linken Hand ein Stückchen dieses überwältigenden, roten Nagellacks abblättert. Ich habe ihr immer gesagt, dass häufiges Lackieren den Nägeln schadet. Sie hat nicht auf mich gehört. Das hat sie jetzt davon. Wenn sie etwas auf meine wertvollen Ratschläge geben würde und vor dem Auftragen des Lacks die Nägel wenigstens mit Zitronensaft einreiben würde, vielleicht wäre er dann erst morgen abgeblättert. Vorsicht, Lehrer in Sicht! Letzte Warnung! Lehrer in Sicht! Ich höre auf. Und schalte um.

13. Mai – Freitag – 7.50 Uhr

Als wenn es noch nicht reichen würde, dass ich die Ziege unter größtem Ekel gemelkt habe, zwang mich Oma dazu, dieses Produkt zum Frühstück zu trinken. Obendrein verkündete sie mir, dass sie nach der Schule in die Stadt kommt und wir gemeinsam einkaufen gehen. Ich werde verrückt! Gebt mir die Zwangsjacke!

Heute ist der TAG DES ROCK. Wieder bin ich vollkommen. Vollkommen vollkommen. Und Taty und Zlatka könnten sich endlich bewusst werden, dass ich auch wenn sie Kerle haben und so tun, als ob sie eine extraschwere quadratische Gleichung in Mathe bezwingen würden, die Schönste von ihnen bin. Und basta.

13. Mai – Freitag – Abends

Meine Nerven! Mit Oma einkaufen ist wie mit dem Einkaufswagen vor sich her durch die Wüste zu irren. Was hat sie gemacht, solange ich nicht mit ihr einkaufen gegangen bin? Das muss eine Tortur gewesen sein! Ich glaube, dass sie bisher immer mechanisch einkaufte. Sie hatte ein festgestecktes Ziel vor sich und ging gerade der Nase nach. Sie griff nach dem ersten Produkt unserer Industrie, welches sie zwischen die Finger bekam, und mehr Aufmerksamkeit widmete sie der Angelegenheit nicht. Ich musste sie zwingen, dass sie sich von mir steuern ließ, und so schafften wir dank meiner außergewöhnlichen Erfahrungen und Fähigkeiten bald alles. Oma hat nur die Augen danach aufgerissen, wie viele Sorten Shampoos es für fettiges Haar gibt. Ehrlich gesagt..., ich wundere mich überhaupt nicht über sie. In diesem Kaff, in dem ich mit ihr leben muss, haben sie im Geschäft nur eine Sorte Shampoo und auch davon nur zwei Stück. Mit vollen Taschen haben wir uns zur Haltestelle geschleppt, wo wie absichtlich Denis stand. Er bot an, uns zu helfen. Im Bus zwang mich Oma, bei ihm zu sitzen (Aber..., das war gar nicht so schlimm, denn er duftete unglaublich.), was mich vollkommen aus der Fassung brachte. Die ganze Zeit hat er mir irgendetwas erklärt, was auch nicht so schlimm gewesen wäre, weil ich ihn meinen Forschungen nach in die Gruppe der Kerle mit schöner Stimme einreihen kann, aber er hat mich völlig verwirrt, weil ich ihm schon mehrmals eindringlich erklärt habe, dass ich mich nie mit ihm treffen möchte. Kaum sind wir ausgestiegen, war er so lieb, dass er uns bis in unsere Küche begleitete. Da meine Oma dachte, ihn belohnen zu müssen, lud sie ihn auf einen Tee ein und er sagte mit ironischem Lächeln, das an meine Person gerichtet war, begeistert zu. Daraufhin bin ich wutentbrannt in mein Zimmer verschwunden,

ANEŽKA SZABÓOVÁ (1986)

nahm an mehreren literarischen Wettbewerben teil. Ihr erstes Buch, *Das gewöhnliche Leben eines gewöhnlichen Mädchens* (*Obyčajný život obyčajného dievčaťa*, 2005), erschien im Selbstverlag. Den Roman *Der blaue Himmel* (*Modré nebo*, 2008) schrieb sie mit achtzehn Jahren in Tagebuchform schon während des Studiums. Ursprünglich hatte sie nicht die Absicht zu publizieren; sie wollte nur alles erfassen, was ihr im Kopf herumging. Erst später begann sie, in Geschichtenform zu erzählen. Die Umgebung, in der sich die Geschichten abspielen – Schule, Familie, Freunde – kannte sie gut; in die Handlung setzte sie auch



Foto © Archiv der Autorin

etwas vom eigenen „Ich“ ein, was für sie charakteristisch ist. Weil sie zur jungen Schriftstellergeneration

gehört, wirken alle Ereignisse im Buch glaubhaft, da sie selbst den Sturm des Heranwachsens erlebte. *Der blaue Himmel* ist die originelle, dynamische Geschichte des sechzehnjährigen Mädchens Laura, das von den Eltern aus der Stadt zur Großmutter auf das Land zur sogenannten „Umerziehung“ geschickt wird. Laura trifft sich hier mit neuen Leuten, lernt Liebe und Freundschaft und die wirklichen Werte im Leben kennen. In ihrer Auffassung spielt sich die Geschichte ungewöhnlich dramatisch ab, mit unerwarteten und überraschenden Peripetien, aber sie ist trotzdem nicht trüb oder voll von Unverständnis, sondern lustig und humorvoll.

riss die Rockerklamotten von mir und schlüpfte in den alten Jeansrock und das kurzärmelige Hemdchen. Ich habe mich selbst gewundert, dass ich selbst in solchen Lumpen noch gut aussehe. Ich kam in die Küche mit den Worten, dass ich einen Spaziergang mit der Ziege machen würde. Oma allerdings durchkreuzte roh meine Pläne. Sie ging mit der Ziege und mir befahl sie, unserem Gast Gesellschaft zu leisten. Wenn sie mir in diesem Moment verkündet hätte, dass sie in den Papst verliebt ist, hätte ich das wohl besser aufgenommen, als die Tatsache, dass ich mit Denis in unserer Küche bleiben soll und ihm eine Tasse Tee kochen soll.

Was für einen möchtest du? – fragte ich genervt, kurz nachdem Oma verschwunden war.

Welche hast du im Angebot?

Früchtetee, Grünen Tee, Schwarzen und Apfel-Zimt-Tee. (Den habe ich mir mitgebracht, weil es mein Lieblingstee ist und wehe er wünscht ihn sich!)

Fein, den Letzten.

(Seit wann kannst du Gedanken lesen???) Könntest du ihn mir reichen?

Warum?

Schaust du keine Filme? Wenn ich mich jetzt bücke, um ihn aus dem Küchenschrank zu bekommen, richtest du deinen Blick auf meinen Hintern und darauf bin ich nicht scharf.

Warum bist du dir da so sicher? – grinste er und stellte sich ungewohnt nah zu mir, fast habe ich Angst bekommen, dass er hört, wie laut mein Herz schlägt.

Du bist ein Kerl, - warf ich ein, den festen Boden unter den Füßen verlierend.

Ja und? – er zuckte mit den Achseln und hielt wieder eine Vortrag. – Wenn ich möchte, könnte ich mir noch viel mehr erlauben, als nur dein Hinterteil zu betrachten. Werde dir bewusst, dass außer uns niemand hier ist und ich glaube nicht, dass du stark genug bist, um mich zu überwältigen. Nur, ich mache so etwas nicht und auch nichts dergleichen, weil ich weiß, was anständig ist und ich richte mich danach, was mir Gott sagt. Er ist mein Lenker und wenn du Ihn zu dir lässt, wird Er dein Lenker, - lächelte er, was mich etwas aus der Fassung brachte, weil es kein gewöhnliches Lächeln war, sondern sich in ihm etwas Ungewöhnliches versteckte. Er beugte sich über mich und reichte mir die Schachtel mit dem Tee.

Danke, – murmelte ich und legte die Teebeutel in die Tassen mit Kirschmotiv.

Ich würde dir gerne den Brief erklären, - fing er so unerwartet an, dass ich beinahe den Kaugummi verschluckt hätte. Er macht perfekte Blasen.

Das muss nicht sein, ich verstehe schon.

Ok. Dann erklär du ihn mir! – forderte er mich auf und lehnte sich mit vor der Brust verschränkten Armen an den Tisch.

(Die Erklärung ist einfach. Du hast nicht alle

„Und ich weigere mich, zu Oma zu gehen. Ich gedenke nicht, an einem Ort herumzusitzen, an dem es ein einziges Geschäft gibt und auch dieses nur drei Stunden am Tag geöffnet ist, das Wort Boutique sagt denen nichts und von einem Internetcafé kann ich nur träumen.“

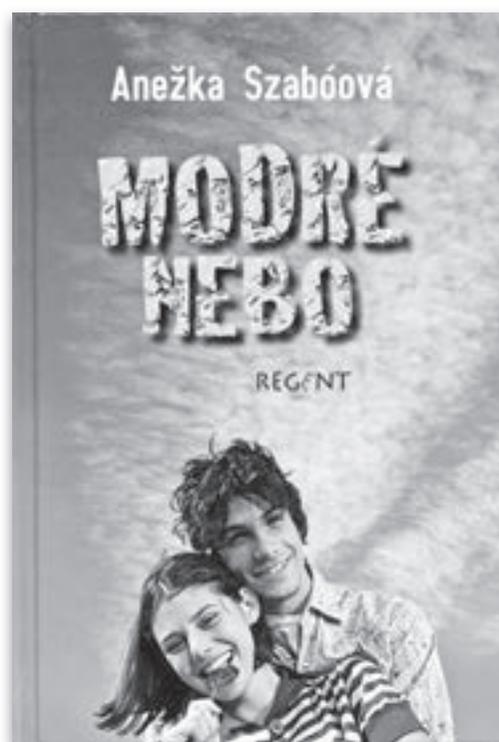
Tassen im Schrank und das macht dich ein bisschen verrückt. Ich habe keine Lust, - motzte ich und kehrte ihm den Rücken.

Wie du meinst, – Denis zuckte mit den Achseln und setzte sich wieder hin. – Ich glaube auch so fest an die Tatsache, dass du einmal deine Meinung von Grund auf änderst. Dann erfährst du die Sachen, die dich vielleicht erfreuen und dir vielleicht überraschen.

Seine letzten Worte habe ich zwar nicht verstanden, aber ich tat so wie Miss Universe nach der Be-zwingung des Mount Everest. Ich möchte vor ihm nicht wie eine dumme Gans aussehen. Es reichte mir das eine Mal, als ich der Ziege in Sieben-Zentimeter-Absätzen hinterherlief.

Übersetzt von **Andrea Barčanová**

Das Buch *Der Blaue Himmel* (Modré nebo) erschien im Verlag Regent, Bratislava, 2008.



ANOTHER FIVE BILLION YEARS

An interview with Ondrej Sliacky, editor-in-chief of *Slniečko*, the oldest Slovak magazine for children

• **Mária Smoláriková:** *Slniečko* (Little Sun) is the only magazine in Slovakia that can boast of having a 75th anniversary. This really is something exceptional. How did *Slniečko* manage to reach this age and how did it build up the wide readership it still enjoys today? What was and is the main aim of its contents?

– **Ondrej Sliacky:** Before I answer your questions, allow me to correct you in the sense that *Slniečko* first appeared in 1927. It therefore has been in existence for a remarkable 85 years, which is no doubt not only a Slovak, but also a European record. Anyway, its founders would certainly be pleasantly surprised to learn that the magazine, which was planned to be published for just a few years until original Slovak literature for children could get off the ground, still exists today. And not just as one of the many such magazines published in Slovakia, but – I humbly suggest – as one that is unrivalled.

• **Mária Smoláriková:** What is the explanation for this?

– **Ondrej Sliacky:** Firstly because it was founded by Matica slovenská, which in the period between the two world wars was the representative national cultural and scientific institution. The people in it were not only excellent authors, but also strategists who acknowledged the wisdom of previous generations, that the culture of the nation should be nurtured among children. In this

case they began by establishing a magazine which was designed to lay the foundations for children's future cultural and moral identity.

• **Mária Smoláriková:** Did they succeed in this?

– **Ondrej Sliacky:** Yes - thanks to Jozef Cíger Hronský. In the period between the wars Hronský was one of the leading Slovak prose writers and authors of literature for children. The talent he had not only enabled him to write classic books of Slovak literature for children, mainly fairy tales and legends, but also made it possible for him to engage people like him to work for *Slniečko*, of which he became editor-in-chief in 1928. So that from the very outset *Slniečko* was not a traditional school magazine with didactic and literary aims, but a periodical "educating the heart of the child". This means that it was designed above all to develop the emotional perception of little school children.

• **Mária Smoláriková:** Did it manage to do this?

– **Ondrej Sliacky:** For the first twenty years it certainly did. Then the totalitarian regime that was coming into existence banned its publication, because by aestheticizing Christian and national values it was in conflict with communist ideology. It was replaced by state-managed magazines that respected neither the child nor the aesthetic principles of their literature.

Prof. Dr. Ondrej Sliacky, PhD (1941), is a writer, literary scholar and journalist. He studied Slovak and history at the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava. He has worked as an editor for the weekly journal *Kultúrny život* (Cultural Life), and from 1970 as an editor for the magazines *Zlatý máj* and *Slniečko* in the Mladé letá ("Young Years") publishing house; from 1990 as the editor-in-chief of *Slniečko*; from 1993 also as the editor-in-chief of the *Bibiana* magazine concerning art for children and young people. He is a professor at the Faculty of Education, Comenius University in Bratislava, and at the University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava. In the field of literary studies he has gradually become an expert on the

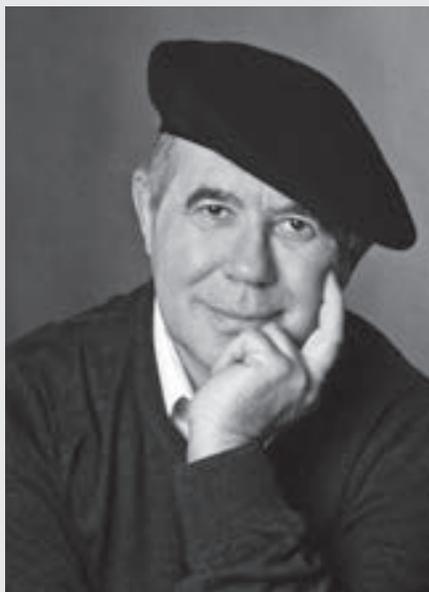


Photo © Soňa Sadloňová

history of literature for children and young people. His first book was *A Bibliography of Slovak Literature*

for Children and Young People (Bibliografia slovenskej literatúry pre deti a mládež) 1945–1964 (1965). He applied the literary-historical approach to anthologies of poetry for children and he is the compiler of the *Encyclopaedia of Slovak Writers for Children and Young People* (Slovníka slovenských spisovateľov pre deti a mládež, 1970; 2nd extended edition 1979). In further monographs in the field of literary history he has examined the beginnings of fiction for children in Slovakia. He is an author of books of short stories for young people, the compiler of an anthology of poetry written during the Slovak National Uprising and he has retold a number folk tales, biblical and classical stories. In 1996 he was awarded the Triple Rose literary prize.

Fortunately, twenty years later, when there were efforts to create socialism with a human face, the writer Mária Ďuričková remembered *Slniečko* and so in 1969, with the support of the then director of the Mladé letá publishing house, Rudo Moric, the first issue appeared of the revived legend of children's literature.

• **Mária Smoláriková: How did it fare after this?**

– *Ondrej Sliacky*: In spite of the snares the totalitarian regime set for it following its reinstatement after 1969, *Slniečko* continued to teach children to appreciate beauty, differentiate between truth and lies, good and evil, to value their own culture and respect foreign ones; it led them along the paths of their own people, so that when they grew up they would not wander like homeless people in a foreign world.

• **Mária Smoláriková: After another twenty years, which is a period that seems to be part of *Slniečko's* destiny, the totalitarian regime collapsed. How did this affect the orientation and standard of the magazine?**

– *Ondrej Sliacky*: With the fall of the Iron Curtain we were not only flooded with democracy, but also with the dregs of Western pseudo-culture. Of course no one forced them on us; we ourselves pounced on those dregs. Fascinated by freedom, we began to give priority to glitz, which in art meant trash, kitsch and commercialism; in children's literature shallow, infantile amusement. But children do not live only in a world of fairs, conjuring tricks and clowning, they live in

a particular social environment. And although much of what happens there is beyond their understanding, they can register and feel it. New commercial trends, however, reject this model of children's literature. Publishing companies producing commercial children's literature do not want to form the aesthetic, societal and social awareness of young readers. After all, such readers would not become future consumers of book, television or film trash and moreover it would not be possible to manipulate them socially, which is perhaps the most important aspect. And all this also posed a threat to *Slniečko*. Fortunately we resisted – although at the cost of a decrease in circulation. Today *Slniečko* has a circulation of 20,000, which it can undoubtedly regard as a success. However, I consider the greatest success to be the fact that *Slniečko* did not abandon its mission to ennoble the child morally and emotionally and thus in fact also humanise the adult world.

• **Mária Smoláriková: I hope you continue to achieve this aim and that nothing more will pose a threat to *Slniečko* in the future.**

– *Ondrej Sliacky*: Thank you and don't worry. The astronomers claim that the sun will keep shining for another five billion years.

• *Thank you for the interview!*

Mária Smoláriková

Translated by Heather Trebatická



THE TRIUMPH OF A CHILDHOOD

Marco Gerbi

Dušan Dušek

La nonna sulla scala

Acco Editore, 2011

Translated by Alena Chocholáčková and Giacomo Vit

Tenderness and poetry. The triumph of a childhood full of good, soothing Things.

What really wins our hearts the moment we open this little book by Dušan Dušek, *Grandma on a Ladder* (Babka na rebríku), is its tenderness and poetry. A story composed of words, but also of sounds, images, smells and memories. The account of a child moving among names, surnames and diminutives, in an atmosphere full of good and soothing things, days spent on holiday in the country and meadows through which it is so wonderful to run.

So many memories! As if we had opened a suitcase and out of it have tumbled the books, toys and school exercise books we never wanted to put aside. Objects reminding us of an ideal period in our lives, a happy island we would occasionally like to return to, at least in our thoughts.

In complete harmony with the text are the illustrations by Katarína Ilkovičová who, with purely classical artistry, captures grandmothers with tempting buns and cakes; little feathers flying as lightly as the thoughts of a child; drops of summer rain sprinkling the earth parched by long hot days like the tears of a grandchild who, when they fall on the ground, urgently needs a loving embrace and soothing words.

The fact that the colour illustrations supplement the text is felt more and more as we read the story; they give the story its own rhythm, highlight the dizzying whirlpool of words and pass on to the reader the feeling of being happy to be alive.

This story by Dušan Dušek unfolds calmly, smoothly, and it proves that with love, love in the lap of the family, everything can be managed with a cheerful smile. It is a message that goes beyond the limits of the tale, a message thanks to which we understand how important to us are those who think of us, who show us their sympathy and offer us a helping hand; we understand how they take us back to our childhood, happy that everything is done with kindness and the feeling that only those can give us who give sincerely, altruistically, without expectation of anything in return.

In this tale of fantasy the grandmother's wisdom and composure immediately come to the fore, complementing very well Ferko's spontaneity. The family portrait is completed by Daddy Ignác, a clever postman, who with masterly skill even makes a new little house for the young offspring of the cuckoo who announces the time in his artificial voice, and then there is Mummy Katka who rides her bicycle as quickly as do so many other mummies who must arrange many different things in one day. Finally

there is Lojzka, the granddaughter with her doll in its paper skirt.

This book is precious in that it knows how to give concrete form to the delight of children discovering the world around them, learning quickly and seeing everything as a game, and in that game we adults play a particular role and have a particular responsibility.

"There is a time for everything," says the Slovak writer and we could add that every stage in life has its magic moments and only thanks to mutual understanding can we fully grasp and appreciate how much easier it is to go through life if we find time for playing with our children. At the same time we should let our aging parents play a role, for with their wisdom and experience of life they can enrich the lives of their children or grandchildren, and in return we can express our gratitude for their care with a loving gesture or a visit – and then we may realise that their magnanimity is unsurpassable.

Dušan Dušek also reminds us in his story that if we want to please a child we do not need expensive and technically sophisticated toys; it is enough to give them space outdoors, in the countryside, where they can freely and without fear run after a ball, where they can dream while gazing up at a flying kite, where they can pedal away on the fastest bike in the world and deeply breathe the unpolluted air. Is it hard to provide all this for someone who represents our own future?

In the conclusion to the story, with the help of magic rain, Grandma not only waters the enormous fruit and vegetables in her garden, but also helps Ferko grow quickly into an endearing boy whose ears, considered before to be too big, suddenly come into harmony with the rest of his body. A nice metaphor of growth, a metaphor of the fact that sometimes our children grow faster than we realise.

Time flies, we like to say, and Grandma also flies when she climbs up the ladder to pick cherries, as does Ferko, carried away on the string of a kite blown by a strong wind full of memories.

Translated by **Heather Trebatická**



PLAYFULNESS AND IMAGINATION

Eliáš Galajda

Stanislav Štepka
Lastivčani kazky
TIMPANI, Uzhhorod, 2012
Translated by Ivan Jackanin

In Ukraine translated Slovak literature for children and young people was always a focus of interest, and Ukrainian readers were thus familiar with the work of classic and modern Slovak authors. The beginning of the 1990s saw an incomprehensible stagnation in this sphere, although children's literature in Ukraine is undergoing a real boom. A Ukrainian writer and translator living in Slovakia, Ivan Jackanin, is trying to fill this gap.

Translating – that is really “reincarnating” from one language to another, from one culture to another, from the author's view of the world to the world of the translator. The translation becomes part of the national literature and fulfils a similar function as the original. It should be added that literary relations and influences are an important catalyst in this literary process.

For several years now Ivan Jackanin has been very actively concentrating on literary translation, especially translation of Ukrainian literature into Slovak, and Slovak literature into Ukrainian. As a result of these efforts his translations frequently appear in the form of books or periodicals at home and abroad.

In the translation in question by Ivan Jackanin we can see how important is the linguistic sphere of the translation. Though this does not in itself constitute the translation, for just as adequacy is sought in the linguistic sphere, on the aesthetic level the same adequacy is required. In fact I would even go so far as to claim that in fiction this level is the decisive one. It is to this level that translator Jackanin subordinates his syntactic and stylistic search.

Stanislav Štepka is a well-known Slovak writer, dramatist, actor, stage director, scriptwriter, as well as being the founder and leading figure in the Radošina Naive Theatre. He has written mainly plays for the theatre, but in 2008 his book for children appeared under the title of *Swallow Tales* (*Lastovičie rozprávky*), which Ivan Jackanin also chose to translate. Thus young Ukrainian readers, their parents and teachers have been able to familiarise themselves with these tales about a family of swallows living at 428 School Street.

Children's literature is an organic part of fiction. However we consider children's literature, we always come to the conclusion that a work of fiction is a work that has artistic value. This is also true of children's literature, which makes self-realization possible for the child. When we talk about poetics and aesthetics in literature for children and young people, the decisive factor is the application of the child's viewpoint

in the process of creating an artistic picture. The child's viewpoint – that is in fact the child's way of understanding and accepting reality. Stanislav Štepka kept this in mind when writing his *Swallow Tales*.

The typical characteristics of the child reader are: perceptiveness, concreteness, visualisation, playfulness and imagination when absorbing and discovering reality. A child learns about objects, phenomena and relations that are expressed, in a playful and dynamic form, much quicker than those which are depicted statically. These aspects of the child's psyche are also reflected in Štepka's tales. There is a playful transition from the real to the imagined, from the serious to the humorous. It is really a game. And games are the most natural ways of learning and actively forming the personality of the child. In Štepka's tales this appears as a synthesis of the realistic and the fantastic. These features are also to be found in the style of *Swallow Tales*. It is simple, explicit and at the same time varied. The style of children's literature is closely connected with the language of children. It is derived from their vocabulary and phraseology. In this way it introduces the reader to a world as yet unknown.

The translator has mastered the above-mentioned characteristic features of Štepka's *Swallow Tales* and so the Ukrainian edition not only supplements the present spectrum of literary translation from Slovak into Ukrainian, but it also makes a further contribution to the deepening of Slovak-Ukrainian and Ukrainian-Slovak literary relations.

Translated by **Heather Trebatická**



*Collective of authors***Ako si vychovať brata
How to Raise Your Brother***Perfekt, Bratislava, 2012*

This book of short stories by various authors is a wonderful combination of good reading and beautiful illustrations. Intended for preteens, the texts not only incorporate their authors' rich imaginative world, but also elements of real life. The collection is the eighth of its kind, and it features well-known as well as lesser-known writers, whose works are judged by children. This results in very interesting evaluations. The stories examine children's perspective on adult life and their perspective on their own world. They often reflect on the problems in sibling relationships. A typical example of this is the short story "How to Raise Your Brother", where the protagonist takes on the task of writing a guide for older siblings on how to resolve problems with their younger brothers and sisters. In the majority of the stories, the problem is resolved in the end, becoming almost a delightful matter: "Having a brother is awesome, even though raising him is a tough job." Family is another theme that appears throughout the book, often it is an incomplete family, or one in the process of breaking up. It is a sensitive, yet very contemporary issue, and the authors pursue it with all due seriousness. An important text is the short story "My Mum is Good" written by G. Futová,

where, in the seemingly flipped view of the heroine who praises her mother, appear the horrors of the life of an abused and neglected child. Other stories include topics such as divorce, children's relationship with their grandparents ("Grannywitch"), friend and classmate relationships ("Imino is a Friend"), together with relationships between the Romany and non-Romany communities, and the functioning of a not very typical Romany household ("Fedor and I"). Quite interesting are the stories about first loves and the astonishment at one's adolescence ("Blame it on the Hormones", "Gangly Girl"). Some also have some sci-fi undertone ("I Can't Just Yet", "Lifelike Anastasia"). A newcomer to the collection is the Czech author I. Březinová with her story "Inkblot", in which a boy "adorns" his body with a tattoo, as is another guest writer, K. D. Horváth, who talks about the situation within peer groups ("Solaris", "The Internet", "Monty and I"). Thanks to these competing collections, over two-hundred remarkable stories have been introduced into Slovak literature.

*Gabriela Futová***Brata musíš poslúchať!
You Must Obey Your Brother!***SPN – Mladé letá, Bratislava, 2011*

With excellent humor, *You Must Obey Your Brother!* presents us the views of two siblings of different



age on awkward life situations and family problems. Their father goes to work in the UK for some time, leaving the rest of the family at home – eighth-grader Dodo, who is, for the time being, supposed to take his father's place as the head of the family, his girlfriend, little sister Žabka (Froggie) and their mom. And it is Žabka who is the root of all trouble. She meddles in everyone's business and there are times when she totally humiliates her older brother. Unintendedly though, since she adores him, although at the same time she also hates him when he bothers her. But she never gets bored with him, because he makes up all these incredible games for her, which, unbeknownst to their mom, sometimes end up a catastrophe. Dodo is well aware that the seemingly flattering bestowal of authority upon him actually masks responsibility and the obligatory care for his little sister. The teenage boy's idea about caring for a six-year-old schoolgirl does not exactly correspond with reality, especially since he has just recently fallen in love with a girl in his class, Zuzka. Things turn out just opposite to what Dodo has planned. That is mainly because he lacks experience and relies on his boy logic. The author works with themes popular among readers – adolescence, coming of age, harmony and disagreement among siblings. At the same time she uncovers the specifics of the boy and girl perspective on the same reality. For the readers, this is a productive and interesting kind of storytelling that let's them see a problem from different angles simultaneously while reading humorous stories that reveal a warm and strong sibling bond.

Petra Nagyová Džerengová

Klára a mátohy

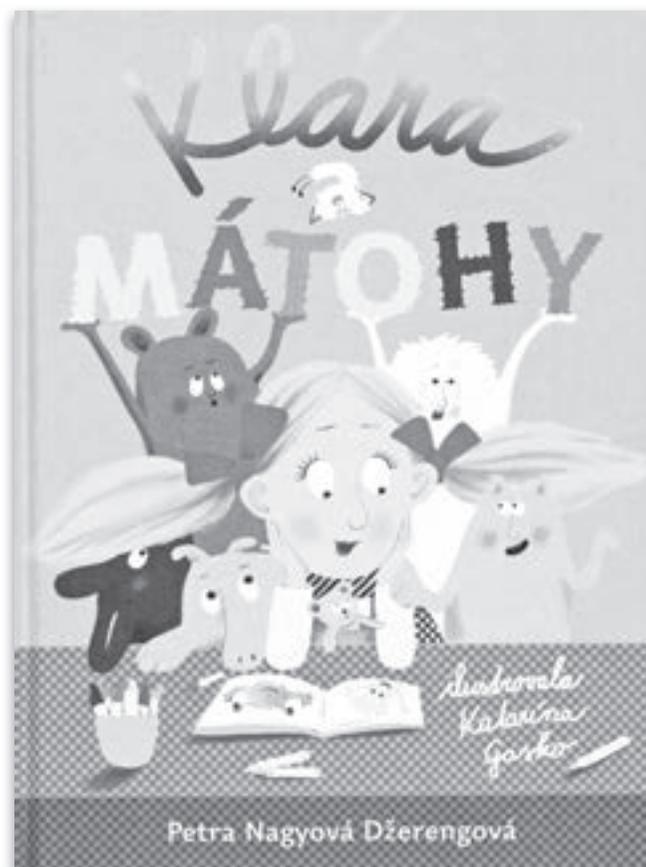
Klara and Monsters

Slovart, Bratislava, 2012

This is the first children's book from the pen of the well-known author of bestselling women's novels. It had actually always been a dream of hers, and she finally realized it in the form of this book. It is a nice and a bit scary story experienced by thousands of children worldwide that we, adults, often do not know about because kids seldom tell us their secrets. It is a story about Klára who will be starting school for the first time once summer vacation is over. And this is not the only change awaiting her – her step-mom is expecting a baby. Klára is excited about having a new sibling, there is only one catch, though: monsters. Monsters under the bed, to be more exact, who do not let her sleep. And so Klára's grandfather, with whom she is staying during the summer, has a task: to help her get rid of her fear and beat those wretched monsters. Among other things, Klára becomes friends with the neighbors and together they have lots of fun-filled, adventurous time. But above of all, on the first night back at home, Klára falls asleep by herself,

accompanied by the dog that her grandpa gave her for her birthday. And when she and her dad go visit her newborn baby sister at the hospital, the baby opens its eyes and smiles at her. At that moment, Klára knows that she will love her little sister very, very much. Having four children of her own, the author drew her inspiration from her own family and experience. Thus she presents the young reader with a true portrait of the present day family with their everyday joys and sorrows.

Translated by **Saskia Hudecová**



*“Slovak children’s literature and illustration forms a miraculous tree with a multiplicity of branches on which different kinds of fruit ripen simultaneously.”
Ľubica Kepštová*

ANASOFT LITERA PRIZE 2012 WINNER

Balla is the winner of the most prestigious literary award in Slovakia – the Anasoft Litera Prize 2012. He received it for his book *In the Name of the Father* (V mene otca, 2011). It is Balla's eighth book. His newest title, *Eye*, has been published this year.

DUŠAN ŠIMKO IN VIENNA

Dušan Šimko, Košice born Slovak author now living in Switzerland, presented his work to the audience in the Slovak Institute in Vienna on the 24th October. He was also speaking about the multicultural town of Košice: about its past in particular. Later in the evening Šimko's newest book, *Reader and Guide to Košice*, was introduced by his Austrian publisher.



Photo © Author's Archive

JANA BEŇOVÁ WINS THE EUROPEAN UNION PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

Jana Beňová won the 2012 European Union Prize for Literature for her book, *Seeing People Off* (*Café-Hyena*). The book was originally published by L.C.A. in 2008, and a reprint was published this year by the Albert Marenčin PT Publishing House. All of this year's laureates received their prizes in Brussels on the 22nd November. The prize is awarded by the European Commission, together with the European Federation of Booksellers, European Congress of Writers and Federation of European Publishers.



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BRITISH PUBLISHERS IN BRATISLAVA

The cooperation between the Centre for Information on Literature, and Literature Across Frontiers enabled representatives of five publishers from the United Kingdom to visit Slovakia to explore its literature and meet the authors and Slovak publishers. British guests also had the opportunity to present themselves on 10th November at the Bibliotéka book fair in Bratislava.



From left John Minahane, Jim Hinks, Gary Pulsifer, Ján Vilikovsky, Alexandra Büchler, Katharina Bielenberg, Simon Smith, Richard Davies.

Photo © Archive of LIC

MONIKA KOMPANÍKOVÁ IN BERLIN

On 22 November, the Anasoft Litera 2011 winner, Monika Kompaníková, presented the German translation of her prize-winning novel, *The Fifth Boat*, at the European Literature Haus in Berlin. The event was organised by the LIC in cooperation with the Slovak Institute in Berlin.



Photo © Pavel Žákovič

FRANKFURT INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR 2012

On Tuesday, 11th October, the Centre for Information on Literature organized several presentations of Slovak authors and their books. The presentation of Michal Hvorecký's successful work, *Danube in America*, took place at the Forum Dialog. The presenter, Daniela Humajová, also introduced Jana Beňová's *Seeing People Off* (*Café Hyena*). This was followed by the party at the Slovak national stand, to which many publishers,

translators and authors accepted an invitation. In the evening another presentation took place, this time at the Frankfurter PresseClub e.V. This event was presided over by the Honorary Consul of the Slovak Republic in Bad Homburg, Dr. Imrich Donáth, who presented the laureates of the Ján Johanides Prize. The director of LIC, Miroslava Vallová, explained the importance of this prize in its wider cultural and social context. Later, Michal Hvorecký read extracts of his book.



From left: Daniela Humajová, Michal Hvorecký, Miroslava Vallová, Imrich Donáth.

Photo © Archive of LIC



On the Slovak stand from left: Lubica Ďurišinová, Michal Hvorecký, Miroslava Vallová.

Photo © Archive of LIC

The portraits of Slovak writers were written, compiled and translated by Daniela Humajová, Ina Martinová, Mária Smoláriková, and Dušan Zupka.

The book reviews on p. 39 and 40 were translated by Heather Trebatická and Saskia Hudecová. Supervision of English Texts: Adrian Brown. Supervision of German Texts Simon Gruber. SLOVAK LITERARY REVIEW / REVUE DER SLOWAKISCHEN LITERATUR. Registration number 2984/10. © Centre for Information on Literature. Address: Námestie SNP 12, SK-812 24 Bratislava, Slovakia. Tel.: +421-2-204 73 507, 204-73-512, Fax: +421-2-52964563, Internet: <http://www.litcentrum.sk>. Editor-in-Chief: Daniela Humajová, e-mail: daniela.humajova@litcentrum.sk. Editors: Ina Martinová, e-mail: ina-martinova@litcentrum.sk, Mária Smoláriková, e-mail: maria.smolarikova@litcentrum.sk, Dušan Zupka, e-mail: dusan.zupka@litcentrum.sk. Graphic Design and Layout: 3H creative studio, spol. s r. o., 2012. Printed in Slovakia by: ETERNA PRESS, s. r. o.

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