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IRENA BREŽNÁ IN LONDON

On 22 November 2011, Slovak writer, journalist and activist, Irena Brežná, read from her book, *Na slepačích krídlach* (On Chicken's Wings), at Imperial College in London. Discussion on multiculturalism and translating followed. The event was organised by SSPUL, LIC and the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in the UK.

JANA BEŇOVÁ AT THE HUMBOLDT UNIVERSITY IN BERLIN

Slovak poetess, prose writer and journalist, Jana Beňová, gave a presentation at the Department of the Slavonic Studies at the Humboldt University in Berlin on 26 January. Jana read from her novel, *Parker* (translated to German by Andrea Reynolds) and from the German translation of novel *Plán odprevádzania* (*Seeing People Off*). The event was organised by LIC and the Humboldt University.



From left: Daniela Humajová, Jana Beňová, Monika Turočková, Roland Hammel.

Photo © Monika Banášová

PETER KRIŠTÚFEK AT THE SLOVAK INSTITUTE IN VIENNA

On 1 February Slovak filmmaker and writer, Peter Krištúfek, presented himself as a prose writer, screenwriter and film director in an event named after his latest feature film, *The Visible World*. Beside the film screening, visitors were able to listen to excerpt from Krištúfek's novels, *The Prompter*, and *Gemini and Antipodeans* in German translation. The event was accompanied by music performance by Martin Tomko.



DANA PODRACKÁ AND EVA LUKÁČOVÁ IN PARIS

During the IBF 2012 in Paris the Slovak poetesses, Dana Podracká and Eva Lukáčová, on the premises of the Slovak Embassy in Paris presented their poetry at the event entitled *The Danubians*. It was hosted and co-organised by Miroslava Vallová, director of LIC, and the Slovak Institute in Paris. French poetess and translator, Jeanine Baude, the co-editor (with Miroslava Vallová) and translator of the selection of poems by ten Slovak female poets, which is to be published in 2013 with the title *Les Danubiannes*, took part at the event, as did His Excellency Marek Eštok, the Slovak Ambassador to France.



From left: Sabeline Amaury, Eva Luka, Dana Podracká, and Michel de Maulne

MONIKA KOMPAŇÍKOVÁ AT THE LEIPZIG BOOK FAIR

Although, owing to budget restrictions, the Slovak collective stand at the Leipzig Book Fair has been missing this year, LIC made an effort to bring at least one author to present our literature at this well-attended event. Prose writer Monika Kompaníková read from her new novel *Piata loď* (*The Fifth Boat*) at two occasions in Leipzig: on 16 March, at the Czech-Slovak evening in Ratskeller der Stadt Leipzig, together with Czech writer Marek Šindelka; and on 17 March, at the premises of the book fair, at "Kleine Sprachen, grosse Literaturen Forum", together with Christos Oikonomou from Greece and Sylwia Chutnik from Poland. Translator Nadine Lenz read extracts in German. This presentation was organised in cooperation with the Slovak Institute in Berlin.



From left: Nadine Lenz, Monika Kompaníková

Dado Nagy

THE INCREASING VARIETY OF SLOVAK LITERATURE

Slovak literature in the past ten years has acquired so many different points of view and literary or extra-literary discourses that sometimes it seems as if at least ten different Slovak literatures were existing in parallel, each having very little in common with the others.

The magazine *Literárny (dvoj)tyždenník* (Literary /bi/ Weekly) reflects above all the work of authors with national sentiments, and the writers' organisations are strikingly partisan in their standpoints. **Oleg Pastier**, writer and publisher of the journal *Fragment*, used to publish mainly works by dissidents, emigrants, or generally authors unfriendly to the regime, during the period of totalitarianism; nowadays he continues to turn his back on commercial writers and devotes himself entirely to displaying Slovakia's "family silver – Ivan Kadlečík, Ivan Štrpka, Alta Vášová".

A recent phenomenon is the appearance of commercially successful writers, who consider literature to be above all relaxation and entertainment. Their fundamental ranking criterion is the position of the author on the sales ladder. Representatives of this group include **Táňa Keleová-Vasilková**, **Evita Urbaníková**, **Dominik Dán**, **Maxim E. Matkin**, **Jozef Banáš** and **Pavel Hírax Baričák**. And after all, why should we refuse to give them some thought? It is hardly a revolutionary notion that significance can be found in the most commercial symbols of the age. Michel Foucault wrote that if we want to understand what is going on around us we should not focus on exalted works of philosophy, rather we should read "brochures" written for ordinary folk. What people are flooded by, what they read and like, what is offered to them as culture, is the key to a basic understanding of the present time. A contempt for ordinary life may lead us to the heights, but at the same time we will lose touch with reality. And of course, one must not leave out of account the viewpoint of those writers who arrived on the literary scene after the revolution, in the 1990s, and who have no interest whatever in politics, ideology, nationality or commerce. The pure literary-aesthetic function of the work is their sole concern. In this respect, they are sometimes so uncompromising that their prose may give the impression of a stylised literary game.

The new-found variety of contemporary Slovak prose has its pluses and minuses. In the first place, it is more and more difficult to find one's bearings on the entire scale of prose-writing, since so many literary genres and sub-genres have successfully established themselves in

the last few years. Examples include historical-romantic prose (**Jana Pronská**), political thrillers (**Jozef Karika**, **Martin Jurík**), and historical novels with a fantasy streak (**Juraj Červenák**).

From this point of view, the authors who appeared on the literary scene in the last decade and were carried along by the powerful readers' interest in home-produced work, have truly been fortunate. In the 1990s, a decade typified by the hunger for translations of foreign bestsellers, even those currently most successful would not have stood a chance.

As a jury member in contests for first-time authors (Debut, I Have Talent), I have noticed the favourable literary atmosphere in recent years. These contests aim not just to give awards and encouragement to young writers, but partly also to discover and nurture a new native literary star. What is fascinating is not only the growth in quantity but also the rising quality of contributions. Amidst the adroit epigones, more and more talents are appearing.

One of them is **Zuzka Slaninka** (finalist in *Debut 2009*), who wrote her story of bikers' life, *In the Beginning Was the Wheel* (Na počiatku bolo koleso, 2010), while still at secondary school. Her linguistic inventiveness and urgency and her fresh young-generation view of a social subculture brought a breeze of authenticity into Slovak prose, along with originally-handled dialogue and slang.

Zuska Kepplová won the prestigious *Poviedka* literary prize, which the publisher Koloman Kertézs Bagala organises yearly. Her debut story-novel *Dumplings in Gothic Tattoo* (Buchty švabachom, 2011) presents a series of tales from a generation of young people living and studying abroad, who are confronted with feelings of alienation, isolation and misunderstanding.

Similarly, **Svetlana Žuchová's** *Thieves and Witnesses* (Zlodeji a svedkovia, 2011) thematises the experience of modern-day emigrants. In her previous book *Yesim* (2006) – the story of a young Turkish singer living in Austria – she had already opened up the questions of emigration, feelings of rootlessness, and the search for one's own identity. The six characters of *Thieves and Witnesses* speak of a gradual overstepping of geographical, cultural and moral boundaries, the inability to come to terms with ageing, and the impossibility of beginning a new life. The life failures of the novel's protagonists are the culmination of their struggle for another existence, more dignified than that which fate had preordained for them. How does a person come to be at rock bottom? How does he become

a thief? How does a relationship imperceptibly dissolve? How do we reconcile ourselves to the loss of youth and its illusions... The author's language is rich in original and vivid comparisons, but the real surprise is her thoroughly thought-out construction. *Thieves and Witnesses* speaks for the most part of gasterbeiters from Romania and Slovakia sweating blood in order to make their way into the middle class which they had so heartily despised in their own countries, but this is also a metaphor for the stupidity with which we live our inauthentic lives and rush after an imaginary picture of happiness.

The theme of voluntary life in exile makes for an interesting comparison with **Viliam Klimáček's** *The Hot Summer of 1968* (Horúce leto '68, 2011). The author based this on his eponymous theatre play presented two years ago in the Slovak Theatre in Toronto. Both play and novel emerged on the basis of interviews with 35 Slovak and Czech emigrants who had left their homeland in 1968 after the invasion by the forces of the Warsaw Pact. The novel's heroes knew that probably they would never be able to return to their country to meet their near ones. It is worthy of note that the author almost completely abandons his typical riot of fantastic and surrealist motifs and remains faithful to the documentary truth.

The Plum Blossom Rain (Dážď slivkových kvetov, 2011), the debut novel of the poet and Sinologist **Elena Hidvéghyová-Yung**, takes place in exotic China. At first sight the tale of the young foreigner Angela and the successful Chinese artist Liang is a classic love story, described in its phase of dissolution. However, the true central theme of this work is the search for one's own identity, truth, sincerity, life's mission, and fidelity to one's inner voice. Angela makes her decision between a scholarly career and the uncertain life of a creative artist, and between life with a secure but cold man and the loneliness of separation. By its structure *The Plum Blossom Rain* makes one think of a composition evolving from two musical phrases. Angela originally combines narrative and reflective components, with space being given to thoughts on China, religion, and the role of the artist; above all though, there are short passages on the secrets of love and its power in human history. The novel's poetic name is a metaphor taken from oriental poetry. Rain symbolises not only sadness and melancholy

but also cleansing and catharsis, and in Chinese culture rain also has strong erotic connotations. The multi-layered structure of Elena Hidvéghyová-Yung's novel corresponds to the complexity of our decision-making on such important matters as the fulfilment of our personal calling and the happiness of life with a partner.

The most emotionally powerful reader's experience in 2011 was **Pavol Rankov's** novel *Mothers* (Matky, 2011). This work, which the author has formally divided into chapters according to alphabetically ranked headings from an encyclopaedia, begins at Christmas in 1944 in a small village in eastern Slovakia, continues in a Russian labour camp, and closes once again in Zálesná Poruba 67 years later. *Mothers* is a masterfully constructed study of one of the most powerful of all bonds: a mother's love and her efforts to protect at all costs her child. However, the mother's love of her child and her protective urge, which remains life long will frequently ignore even basic moral principles. Variations are played on the themes of self-sacrifice and also maternal blindness and pugnacity, and these motifs are confronted with one another in various ways.

One of the high points of prose-writing in 2011 was a Slovak novel written in Hungarian, *Borderline Case* (Hraničný prípad, 2011). The author **Péter Hunčík** is a psychiatrist of Hungarian origin living in Slovakia, who also concerns himself with the question of Slovak-Hungarian inter-ethnic relationships. His novel appeared in Hungarian in 2008 and received a considerable response, especially in Slovakia's multi-ethnic southern parts. The Macondo of the story in *Borderline Case* is Šahy, a little town in the south of Slovakia, and the novel captures the stormy, absurd and often tragic character of 20th century history from the point of view of Hungarians living there. The author published this work in his mother tongue at the age of 58 and won the Sándor Bródy Prize for the best Hungarian debut novel of the year. In many ways the book illuminates Hungarian-Slovak relationships, as well as relationships with the Czechs, Germans, Russians, and the Jewish community in that region. The heroes of the novel are linked not only by the history which they share but also by professional, personal and family relationships. The narrators are small boys from different social strata, who wittily and succinctly describe the changes in circumstances and attitudes. Naturally, their perceptions of the present time and of fundamental historical events depend on their angles of vision and their ethnic or social affinities.

In the field of literature for youth **Juraj Šebesta** had already drawn attention in 2008 with a novel of family life *When the Dog Laughs* (Keď sa pes smeje), much enjoyed by readers. For this he received a number of literary prizes, as well as being included in the IBBY's honourable mentions list and being a finalist of the ANASOFT LITERA Prize. In 2011 he returned to the young readers' novel genre with *Venussha (Hard Week)* - Venussha (Ťažký týždeň). In this instance the heroine is 13-year-old Lucia, who is preparing to celebrate her birthday. The novel is divided into seven chapters according to the days of the week. Juraj Šebesta

DADO NAGY (1970)

is a publicist, presenter and populariser of literature. He studied Russian and English at Bratislava's Comenius University. He prepares programmes for radio and TV, regularly organizes and presents literary events, and is also a jury member for a number of literary prizes and contests.



Photo © Author's Archive

dynamically combines narration in the first and third persons and uses theatrical procedures in his dialogue. The book's central theme is the relationship of father and daughter. The father, Branislav, is disadvantageously placed for raising his "big adolescent". Having spent a long time in the search for employment, his ego has shrunk noticeably, bailiffs are knocking on the door, and his attempt to keep up the image of a dignified and authoritative parent takes on a distinct air of tragicomedy. The author's greatest bonus is his ability to take a humorous overview and to use the authentic language of teenagers. The survey of exceptional recent works by Slovak authors includes extracts from a new collection of shorter prose pieces, *The Fundamental Administrator*

(Správca podstaty, 2011), by **Daniel Hevier**, the most versatile of Slovak authors, as well as some extracts from the work of "Slovakia's best-known unknown writer", **Kornel Földvári**. This renowned theoretician of verbal and graphic humour, and champion of detective and adventure stories, celebrated his 80th birthday at the beginning of 2012. Finally, showing the polar opposites in contemporary Slovak literature, there are extracts from work by the highest selling Slovak author, **Maxim E. Matkin**, and by one of those who have won most awards, **Máriuš Kopcsay**.

Translated by **John Minahane**

Kornel Földvári

STORIES OUT OF MOTHBALLS

ARS POETICA

"That Čapko really has shown us his true colours!" the Head of Accounts declared complacently, just as if he were announcing a special bonus.

"Čapko?" asked the alarmed Director. "Which one's that? The one with the wart?"

"With the wart up left. Father's a locksmith, working for the municipal services at the moment," the Head of Human Resources readily informed him.

"Just what I expected! They're going to penalize us again," the Finance Officer woke up.

"Much worse," said the Head of Accounts, happily pulling a newspaper out of his pocket. "The company's reputation is in ruins!"

"What? You don't mean to say he's written to them about the plan for May?" the Director jumped to his feet, his chin trembling.

Instead of replying the Head of Accounts began to recite in a lofty tone.

The summer ripens once more in the lust of August.

And I eagerly pick the apples of your breasts...

"Good God, what's this?" the Director exclaimed, his eyes shooting up to somewhere in the middle of his purplish bald forehead.

"A poem," said the Head of Accounts laconically, and bowing slightly. "The author: Pavel Čapko."

"...the apples of your breasts, hehehe," sniggered the Finance Officer, but he immediately pulled himself together and blinked ashamedly.

"That is immorality of the worst kind!" the Deputy Director exclaimed indignantly. "The apples of your breasts!"

The secretary tried to blush and secretly cast a loving glance at her own supply.

"The apples wouldn't be so bad of themselves," the Head of Accounts commented drily. "The tragedy is that he signed his own name. I don't think anyone in our little town will doubt for a moment that this lecher works here. How will we look now in the eyes of the public? As if the only thing we did here was to pick..."

"I've got nothing against picking as such, but he needn't have gone and put it in the papers," hissed the Director. "Really, what light does it cast on our company? This will be our downfall! We have betrayed the trust of the working class; we employ debauchees!"

"I don't like to contradict you," said the Finance Officer timorously, "but so far as I know, Čapko is one of our most exemplary workers."

"I doubt that," retorted the Director. "I have a strong suspicion that he might be picking those apples in working hours."

The Head of Accounts eagerly jumped to his feet:

"I propose that we should include this resolution in the minutes:

1. To find out when, where and with whom Čapko picks.
2. To criticise him at the next plenary session for his dissolute way of life.
3. To persuade him to write articles for the company's journal instead.

If he doesn't obey, to categorically order him to limit himself to morally innocuous topics.

4. To keep a close eye on him and definitely not recommend him for the trip to Germany."

"And to be on the safe side, we won't give him a bonus," the Director closed the meeting.

When the others had departed, he remained staring blankly at the wall and breathing irregularly.

Then he turned to the secretary, his eyes shining.

“Marienka,” he smiled at her dreamily. “Pop out and buy me a kilo of apples, please.”

THE DECALOGUE

*...so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.
(Deuteronomy 34:8)*

Mount Sinai was shrouded in thick smoke, because the Lord had descended in fire upon it to the sound of trumpets and choirs of angels.

“God of my fathers,” called Moses humbly, falling to his knees in the dust, “please be so kind as to have a look at the Decalogue that I have brought and judge in Your infinite goodness whether I may spread it among my people.”

“Come near, my son, and do not fear if you have engraved the tables of the Decalogue according to my instructions,” said the Lord, gazing with pleasure at the regular inscription.

Suddenly the shining Divine face frowned, lightning flashed from the all-seeing eye and an august voice roared through the heavens: “What’s this ‘Thou shalt have no other gods before me’? That sounds as if there were other gods! No other gods exist; the idea that they do exist can’t be allowed even for a minute!”

“Oh, Lord of the heavens, of course they do not exist,” Moses said, writhing at his feet, “that is just a stylistic ploy for those who are still lost in doubt. In order to win over the doubters I...”

“No doubters are going to be won over; my right hand will wipe them out with fire and sulphur!” thundered the divine voice of God’s anger and dark clouds covered the sky. “There’ll be no horsetrading with doubters; they will simply be annihilated! Don’t even think of doubts!”

“Yes,” whispered Moses, casting dust upon his head.

The Omnipotent calmed down, seeing his devoutness and humility.

Very soon, however, the summit of the mountain was again covered by black clouds in the middle of which the face of Jehovah frowned heavily. His voice once more made the rocks shake, and spoke thus: “And what’s ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery’ meant to mean? Moses, Moses, why you are attributing to my good and chosen people characteristics they do not and cannot have! Or do you want to say that committing adultery is the most typical aspect of our times? From what point of view did you write this, you wretched reptile? Do you realise how this slander plays into the hands of the Philistines, Egyptians, Babylonians and other unbelievers?”

“My soul is grieved to have fallen into divine disfavour,” Moses groaned, “however, I suppose...”

“When serving God you should not suppose, or even think,” said the Creator. “You had better leave it out or reword it. I recommend you to do that from the depths of My infinite goodness.”

“But, Adonai,” Moses said, lifting his head, “reason and

my mind tell me...”

“Die: dust you are and unto dust shall you return!” the kind voice of the Lord sweetly flowed into Moses’ ears. “You know, being omnipotent it would be no trouble for Me to change you into the mud from which I created in my own likeness your forefather, undeserving Adam. I am not ordering you to omit it, though; I am just advising you to do so in the interests of improving your work. Consider it for yourself and decide according to your own free will!”

As if just by chance, with a mighty flash of lightning, the divine hand rolled aside half the rock on which they were standing.

“Ye...ye...yes,” Moses from the house of Levi stuttered as he tried to get his breath back. “In fact, you’re right. Actually, when I come to think about it, I find I was mistaken. I guess it would be best to leave it out.”

Rays of sunshine fell on his bowed head. The Lord towered above him in all His majesty and goodness.

“Go, my son, correct it and teach all the tribes of my chosen people!” said God, blessing him.

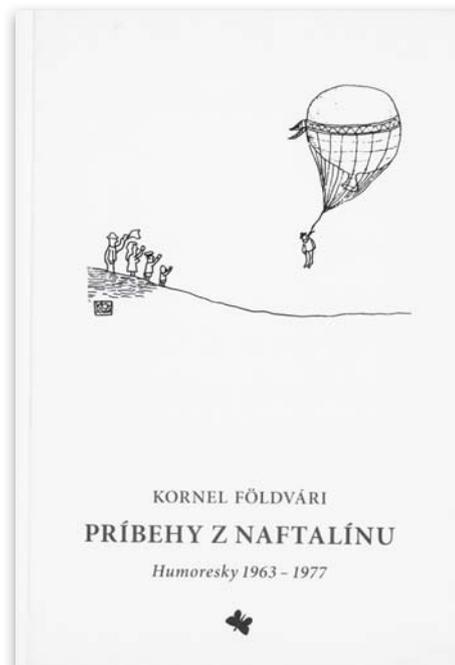
As Moses was meekly going down the mountain, He called after him: “In particular make sure there is less philosophising in it and more bright sunshine! Stuff it with manna, draw the Promised Land in the colours of the rainbow and don’t lord it over the others!”

Moses flew into such a rage that he flung the tables away from him, smashing them against a rock at the foot of the mountain.

Then he descended into the valley and bowed deeply before the golden calf.

Translated by **Heather Trebatická**

The book *Stories out of Mothballs, Humorous Tales 1963 – 1977* (Príbehy z naftalínu, Humoresky 1963 – 1977) was published by Koloman Kertész Bagala, L. C. A. Publishers group, Levice, 2003.



KF IS 80

I am not going to write about Kornel the writer; there are others more qualified for that. I will just say a few words about Kornel the man.

One reason why I admire him is because he has never let himself utter a bitter word. Despite the fact that they were always throwing him out. From the university and the workplaces he loved (the journals *Kultúrny život* and *Mladá tvorba* and in particular the theatre *Divadlo na horze*).

They threw him out because of his bad class background. (Dear young friends, you don't know what a bad class background is? Be glad you don't!)

And Kornel, in spite of all this...

If Romain Rolland had known him, he would have written a sequel to his novel about a good man, *Colas Breugnot*.

What makes Kornel the way he is? "

His wife NadĽha has put it very well: Kornel is good because of respect for life.

Of course Kornel always says and writes just what he thinks. Clearly, without obfuscation and with a great sense of humour. Kornel is, in short, a master of style. And we know that the style is the man himself.

So I have, after all, got from Kornel the man to Kornel the writer.

Dear Kornel, I am very glad that I have had the good fortune to know you.

Tomáš Janovic

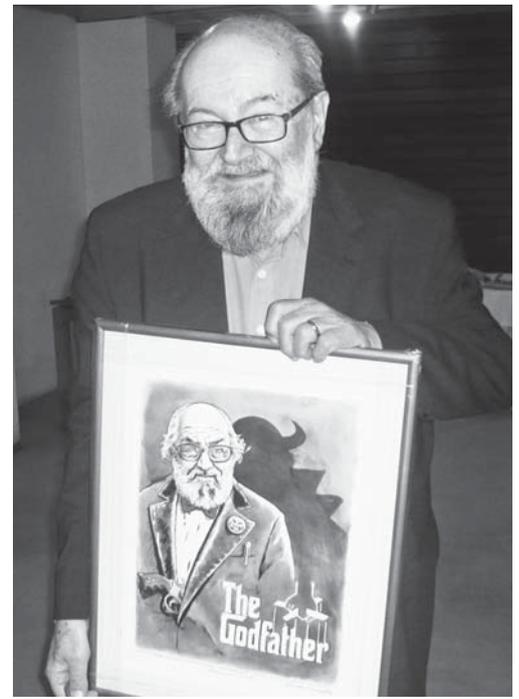


Photo © Dušan Zupka

Dear Kornel,

You may not believe it, after all I myself find it very hard to believe, but it is already more than fifty-five years since our paths crossed for the first time. I didn't know you personally then, you were just a name at the end of a letter I received from the editorial office of the journal *Mladá tvorba* in response to my first efforts in prose. Of course you won't remember that because you wrote hundreds of similar letters, but its kindly tone strengthened my determination to cover blank paper with writing. Whether you will be commended or reproached for that, in this way you played a crucial role in my literary career. And I certainly was not the only one: in the many years (unfortunately often interrupted by a disapproving regime) when you contributed to Slovak culture as an author, editor, critic, literary adviser and in other roles, you helped many people, trends and projects to find their feet. The classics of modern Slovak humour, *Lasica* and *Satinský*, have also acknowledged your contribution to their development. The rousing laughter with which you as director of the theatre *Divadlo na horze* accompanied their performances, was an excellent marketing gambit at a time when this term was unknown, and it was not the only occasion on which you were before your time.

When I later met you in person, I discovered that even such an enemy of cliché as you are had nevertheless failed to avoid one: you hid your kindly heart and mischievous smile under the tough appearance of a western desperado. However, you did not hide them very well, because even in those long gone times you embraced artistic fields and genres that our culture, nesting in pulpits and on rostrums, tried not to see. Works about cowboys and Indians, detective stories, comics, cartoons and other ideologically or snobbishly-disowned illegitimate children of "high" art found in you not only a benign guardian, but also an untiring promoter, and thanks to you they can now sit at the more spacious, even though still poorly-laid, table of Slovak culture.

In spite of the obstacles that the "red brothers" (local, not those from overseas) put in your path, you have not only kept your youthful vitality and élan - your creative heyday in times of freedom could be compared to Pushkin's "Boldino autumn" - but also your proverbial kind heart. Allow me on the occasion of your jubilee to express the wish and plea that it may beat for many years to come for the pleasure and good of your friends, readers and the Slovak cultural community as a whole.

Yours, Pavel Vilikovský

KORNEL FÖLDVÁRI THIRTY YEARS OLD!

The reader should not be confused by the title of this short piece. On the contrary, when I am writing about someone whose mental age does not correspond in any way to his physical age, it is absolutely correct and justified. Yes, Kornel Földvári has a thirty-year-old spirit confined in an eighty-year-old body. I have gathered ample proof of this over the years I have known him. That is, he allows himself to be talked into almost anything. There are few of his generation that I could happily put into a go-cart and allow him to be chased at top speed by Batman himself, as I did when shooting a television programme about comics (*Silná káva*, 1999). Not just everybody would let themselves be shot in scene from a thriller, with artificial blood running down his shirt and beautiful thick beard (*Umenie*, 2005). Not everyone would fire a pistol in a shooting range for the first time in his life with such gusto and then willingly dress up in various historical costumes, finding those that suited him best were those of a cowboy, pirate and a highway robber (*GEN*, 2009). It was partly thanks to our meeting on such occasions that we became friends and when we are discussing things I sometimes feel like a conservative old man in comparison to him.

For several years we have been putting together his biography, which would make a wonderful dramatic novel just as it is. I was the only one he allowed into his flat to tidy up his books and in spite of the fact that for reasons of space it would be better not to have given him any more, I couldn't resist bringing back from Reykjavik a copy of Sherlock Holmes in Icelandic for him to add to his collection. Kornel Földvári has a wonderful and original personality with many levels and dimensions. As many as there are solutions to the murders in his popular detective stories.

Peter Krištúfek

KORNEL FÖLDVÁRI (1932)

symbolizes the humorous side of Slovak literature. In his turbulent life Földvári has worked as a writer, columnist, translator and art and literary critic. His "wrong social background" caused him severe problems during his studies and work experience in the 1950s in the Communist regime. For the same reason he was unable to publish his works in the 1970s. In the past he worked as editor on the literary journals *Mladá tvorba* and *Kultúrny život*, and from 1992 as dramaturge in the L+S Theatre in Bratislava. Today, celebrating his 80th birthday, Földvári is one of the most prominent figures in caricature and humour on the Slovak literary scene. His collected essays, published with the title *On Caricature* (*O karikatúre*, 2006), brought him the prestigious Dominik Tatarka Prize in the same year. Kornel Földvári has profiled himself as a leading person of the informal culture, publishing numerous articles and essays on



Photo © Peter Krištúfek

the art of humour and "marginal literature" (detective fiction, spy or sci-fi literature). His debut collection of satirical short stories, *Untypical Events* (*Netypické príbehy*, 1963), was published under the pen name of Miroslav Kostka. This book was awarded the Haškova Lipnica Prize. Because of the political situation, the second collection of essays and stories from the 60s and 70s could be published only in 2003 with

the title *Stories out of Mothballs, Humorous tales 1963 – 1977* (*Príbehy z naftalínu*, 2003). In the years of his publishing embargo he managed, under the pen name Pavol Miškovič, to publish an inventive volume about an unconventional book illustrator and painter Dušan Polakovič (1987). Földvári has also found a special interest in composing afterwords in the books of his favourite authors (Agatha Christie, Karl May or Raymond Chandler). He has also published works related to the legendary comedic couple Milan Lasica and Július Satinský, *A World for Two* (*Svet pre dvoch*, 2004), and translated several German speaking authors (S. Zweig, F. Werfel, and H. M. Enzensberger). Kornel Földvári also compiled an anthology of Slovak prose, *A Slovak Reader – 14 Hot and Spicy* (*Slovenská čítanka – 14 ostrých*, 2005). His latest published work is a collection of essays and short portraits of most important representatives of detective fiction: *On Detective Fiction* (*O detektívke*, 2009).

If the human race had to send someone to represent them at a cosmic meeting of civilizations, I should like to nominate Mr Kornel Földvári; because in that case we would present ourselves as being decent, cultivated, benevolent and tolerant. They would think we take suffering as an impetus to be good and injustice as a reason to defend those who have been humiliated. They would admire the humour and wit of terrestrial beings and they would hold us up as an example of culture. I can already imagine how, after some initial hesitation, those beings from outer space would begin to smile over Kornel's stories, until in the end they would all be laughing heartily over a drink and with unconcealed pleasure commenting on our universe. So, if ever such a contest should take place, you know who should represent us. That is, if humankind still wishes to present itself as a species in which decency and humour overcomes loutishness and arrogance.

Daniela Kapitáňová

Mila Haugová

GEDICHTE

SCHLAFLIED WILDER TIERE

DORMI 3

Pferde sind Lichttiere.
Ziel der Reiterin mit Stern.
Pfeil von einem Pfeil durchbohrt. Ich ergründe
Von innen her deine seidige Lippe.
Muster aus Licht fallen auf
Ein langes entblößtes Bein.

Einführung ineinander

Man kommt nicht umhin Worte zu haben
(Zwischentier)

Als seien
die Illusion das Schweigen der Zufall Körper geworden die
zurückschaut bist du

Als würde eine endlose Kamera den endlosen Raum filmen
und dort wo wir nicht enden
entstände ein Gesicht ohne mich im tiefen
(gelbbraunen) Gras
eines abgehörten Winters

10. 12. 2007

Levitation

Ich sehe was um mich ist: Sekunden Ein gelängtes Raster
Die Zeit gegen die Lichtgeschwindigkeit gestellt:
Nachtaufnahmen
leere Flughäfen Autos Züge
Durchsichtige Räume ewigen Verkehrs

Dithyramb

Das Gesicht eines chinesischen Kindes im Schlaf ein
wortlos
verschlossener Planet umherwandernd
in der wachsenden Ferne des Universums - - -

DIE ZÄRTLICHKEIT DER DISTANZ IST SCHUSSFEST

(Im Zoo kommt ein kleines weißes Nashorn auf die Welt)

Eine Szenerie: Ein nach der Gabel gestimmter Wasserfall
(Traumstrom)
Zweite Szenerie: Frauen in sonnigem Regen
(für immer kleine Mädchen)

Dritte Szenerie: Volière mit hyazinthfarbenem Papagei
(Paradiesersatz)

Vierte Szenerie: Wer sind wir zwei
(wer hat uns hier gemeinsam hergerufen?)

(Meiner Tochter Elvira ZOO Wien Mai 2008)

DAS ZIMMER

Perlmuschel.
Noch habe ich mich nicht ganz geschlossen; die Hände
Beine
wachsen mir kreuz und quer übers Bett und ein Kopf
(deiner)
Du sagst übers Bett hin so ist es besser
die Matratzen sind anders positioniert
Zärtlicher werden ich weiß bloß nicht ob ... und wann
du kommst
wir wissen nicht wie man sich trennt rund waren Tag
und Nacht
Wie ein Apfel von Cézanne - - - es ist Sonntag es ist
Montag
12. und 13, Juli 2010
Sich lieben als würden wir in goldenen Felsen klettern

(eigentlich war für dich der 11. Juli der Tag außerhalb des
Kalenders)

Für Igor

REH HINTERM TRAUMZAUN

Zielscheibe; im Zimmer eine echte Rose
mit enger Kehle beobachte ich
Rouaults (dein) Harlekin ist
der dunklere Abdruck der Liebe
ich will ihn nicht enträtseln
das Geheimnis des Verlusts treibt
durch die verfrühte Kälte
im ausgedehnten
Augustfirmament das beginnt
ein Himmel zu sein
und einen Raum öffnet
aus Selbstlauten ...

CRIMSON ALIZARIN

Tyrannie der Intimität um zehn vor halb zehn
mit dem Gesicht in seines geschnitten meine Brille
und die Uhr am Arm und an der Wand deine
scharfen
braunen Augen vor allem das rechte dort streckt sich
eine schon unsichtbare Narbe (ich kann sie mir

rot und lebendig vorstellen in deinem jungen Gesicht)
jetzt an den Schläfen pulsieren nicht wahrnehmen
wie ein feiner Stich Rot
an die Oberfläche durchschlägt

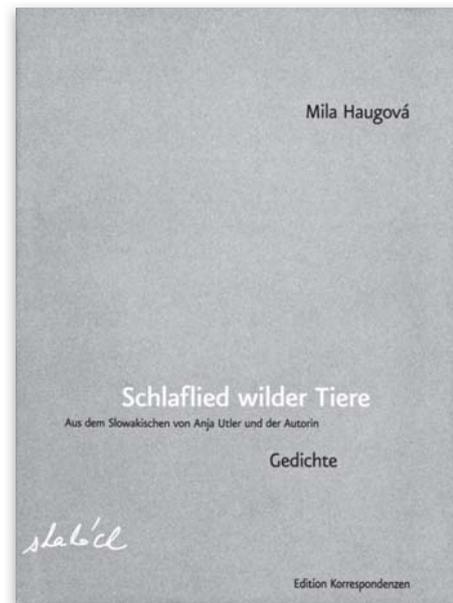
schlaf schon du bist das Bild ein dunkler Weiher
verwachsen mit silbernen Weiden und Espen in
der Mitte ein Haus fleischfarben rosig verschwindet
als sei es nie da gewesen du weißt schon dass
ja und nein für uns ein und dasselbe ist
Dämon der Liebe jetzt
Dämon des Todes immer

(ein schlafendes Reh im Labyrinth)

(22. Mai 2011 Zajačia dolina)

Übersetzt von **Anja Utler** und **der Autorin**

Das Buch *Schlaflied wilder Tiere* (Uspávanka divokých zvierat) erschien in Edition Korrespondenzen, Reto Ziegler, Wien, 2011.



MILA HAUGOVÁ (1942),

Poetin, Übersetzerin und Publizistin, gehört zu den herausragenden Talenten der Frauendichtung und ist unsere im Ausland meistübersetzte Dichterin. Ihr Debüt in der Poesie gab sie relativ spät mit der Sammlung *Rostiger Lehm* (Hrdzavá hlina, 1980). Es folgten die Sammlungen: *Wechselhafte Oberfläche* (Premennivý povrch 1983), *Mögliche Zartheit* (Možná neha, 1984), *Reine Tage* (Čisté dni, 1990), *Urliebe* (Prálska, 1991), *Nostalgie* (Nostalgia, 1993), *Dame mit Einhorn* (Dáma s jednorožcom, 1995), *Alfa Centauri* (1996)... In ihrer Poesie präsentiert sie einen weiblichen Blick auf die Welt der Liebe. Reflexionen über das menschliche Glück, zwischenmenschliche Beziehungen und den Tod tauchen auf. Naturbilder beeinflussen den psychischen Zustand des lyrischen Subjekts. In weiteren Sammelbänden wie beispielsweise *Flügelfrau* (Křídlatá žena, 1999) zeigt sich das dichterische Subjekt in verschiedenen Lagen. Es handelt sich um eine Poesie der Rückbesinnungen, flüchtigen Erinnerungen, retrospektiven Erwägungen. Zugleich sind die Gedichtstexte voller intellektueller stilisierter Reflexionen über Fragen des Seins und des Vergehens der Zeit, bereichert um eine starke existenzielle Dimension. Es folgen die Sammlungen *Sandatlas*



Foto © Archiv der Autorin

(Atlas piesku, 2001), *Geschlossener Garten (der Sprache)* (Zavretá záhrada /reči, 2001), *Orfea oder der winterliche Bergpass* (Orfea alebo Zimný priesmyk, 2003). *Archive des Körpers* (Archívy tela, 2004) ist keine gewöhnliche Gedichtsammlung. Die Dichterin erklärt: „ich erzähle keine geschichten. ich ordne mir bilder zu.“ Ihre Bilder sind jedoch so farbig und erfüllt von einem feingespinnenen Inhalt, dass es uns oft vorkommt, als würden wir Romane lesen oder – genauer – die Romane ihres Lebens, die Romane ihrer Leben. Eine bedeutende Stufe in der Entwicklung der Dichterin stellt die Sammlung *Das Vergehen der Engel* (Miznutie anjelov, 2008) dar,

ein Büchlein der lyrischen Gedichte voll Reflexion und Meditation, nicht ohne einen Anflug von Dramatik. In *Die langsame Bogenschützin* (Pomalá lukostrelkyňa, 2010) fängt sie die Vielseitigkeit der gegenwärtigen Welt und des Menschen darin ein. Zentrales Thema ist das Verhältnis zwischen Mann und Frau und die Sehnsucht, es möge sich erfüllen. Ihr neuestes Werk ist die zweisprachige deutsch-slowakische Gedichtsammlung *Schlaflied wilder Tiere* (Uspávanka divokých zvierat, 2011). Bei diesem Band handelt es sich um eine von der Autorin zusammengestellte Auswahl aus den beiden Gedichtbänden *Weißer Handschriften* (Biele rukopisy, 2007) und *Das Vergehen der Engel* (Miznutie anjelov, 2008). Ausgangspunkt ist ein doppelter Verlust. Die Mutter stirbt und der Geliebte geht eigene Wege. Zurück bleibt ein reduzierter Alltag durchflochten mit allgegenwärtigen Erinnerungen. Haugová lässt sich ein auf die nun aufbrechenden Bilder der Kindheit und der Tage mit dem Geliebten. Findet sich in dieser erkaltenden Welt noch ein Rest der Wärme von einst? In ihren Gedichten konzentriert sich Mila Haugová auf das Wesentliche der Aussage, auf die Genauigkeit der Benennung und deren Übersetzung in die Form des Gedichts.

KÖRPERARCHIVE

Kassandras Garten

- und aus der Vitrine der Zeit –
 erinnert sie nicht das eigene Gesicht
 oder erinnert sie sich daran am wenigsten:
 einzig leuchtet die Welt
 hinter gesenkten Lidern:
 stimmhafte Bewegung
 Form des verlorenen Wachses:
 die Spur des Mannes in der Frau
 kapillarartiger Pflanzenkörper:
 Reinigung von Entfernungen
 Garten im Körper des Auges:
 Grenzlinie der Träume
 Gameten Algen Rhizom:
 der Regen verwäscht uns
 ein Horizont wo es keine Vögel gibt:
 der Körper zieht die Geschichte an
 ein langsames dunkles Loch im Eis:

Kleiner Wolf

Der Winter dringt jetzt ein in meine
 Betonhöhle ich träume wie er angekrochen kommt
 (irgendwo im nebligen Gedächtnisursprung)
 ans Feuer (ein grünes Aufblitzen im schmalen Auge)
 vorsichtig legt er sich zu meinen Füßen und so
 schlafen wir
 an der erkaltenden Glutasche
 Schnee im Gesicht
 fängt er an mich zu lieben.

* * *

Hortus conclusus

Linie in der sie träumt die Karten verdichtet
 mit feineren Zeichen
 (sie fürchtet nicht ähnlich zu sein) schläft in der
 Tochter
 Wasser unter Glas angespannt fängt sie an diejenige zu
 sein

die hier ist. vielleicht atmet sie nachher.
 obwohl. oder auch nicht. *geschlossenes Eindringen*.
 paralleles Lieben in der Fremdsprache
 ist *beinahe wie* Tod.

unsichtbare Wortart. inneres Steintor.
 der geschlossene Garten (der Sprache) wer weiß ob
 dann wieder. vergessen. den Satz das Kalligramm. nichts
 mehr. mehr nichts. kümmere um dich selbst. einzig.
 die Welt (die einzige) glänzt unter geschlossenen
 Lidern (Weinen). dein atmendes Gesicht. durch
 den Sand des Wortes.

9. 9. 1999 Blume der Nomaden

In der stillen Sprache des Seins

Garten: für ferne Schläfer
 (feinen Mohn bietend) *hier* kippt unter die Lider
 der Oktobernebel. schau hier ist
 ein Ort wo nichts wächst. schau schmale
 Abdrücke wo nun (zwischen
 dem Garten und der Mauer) dein Gesicht hervorsticht
 mit der Maske des Engels
 Sebastian hier in der Deckung des Wortes...
 beobachtend (beobachtet) das innere
 Steintor (schwer zu öffnen)
 den Wortkörper viszerales Atmen
 Lumineszenz der Vokale jeden
 Nachmittag sich mit ihm hinlegen
 und nichts über ihn wissen
 eine beinahe vollkommene Nachricht wie
 ein großes erleuchtetes Schiff auf dunklem Fluß wie
 die Trauer nach einem Ort an dem ich nicht geliebt habe
 Wasserflügel ausgespannt abgerissen
 Wasserschlucht stumme Wassermühle
 (daß alles aufhören muß)

Weißes Manuskript

Osmose das Atmen der Dinge ich habe dich nicht
 ausgewählt. du kamst.
 eine offene Zielscheibe, wachsend; tief gebeugt bitte
 ich dich Herr laß mir
 nur das war in mir Deins ist; ein namenloses Geschenk;
 ich schreibe getrennt von jedem;
 ich schreibe wie ich von jedem getrennt bin.
 der Altar am Ende des Ganges (Er) wird wieder
 zuhören
 schreibt er es auf schreibe ich es auf

11. 1. 2004

Übersetzt von **Slávka Porubská**

Das Buch *Körperarchive* (Archívy tela) erschien im
 Leipziger Literaturverlag Edition Erata, Leipzig, 2006



Milan Richter

POEMS

Stray Dogs In Granada

stroll through the square, where the poems' staccato
gives way to the rhythms of trumpets, harmonicas,
drums,
Mejía Godoy and costumed beauties, barefoot dances,
dog after dog passes before us, lithe
and unhurried, his narrow face glides into dark
as into a dream, yes, these dogs are our dreamed dead,
eyeing us sidelong, while they silently
pass about us, they do not halt, they disappear,
and as soon as rhythms, dances, beauties
overwhelm us,
straight they are here, by the same route returning
in front of us, fur and sex glittering
as if in the darkness they'd been dipped in dew,
proudly
they move bare-footed over the square's warm flags,
in their narrow faces you'd guess the secret whispered
in the dark, in another world, yes, these are the souls
of our dead, who for the instant have found living
shape,
straying beings, not close-clinging, not at all, faces
without tears, mutely I whisper *Helena, mummy, Peter,*
Gerhard, Eta, Rick, I know they will not stay,
for if they stayed, the secret whispered in the dark
I would understand instantly, agape,
I, amidst them straying, a stray dog
somewhere at that other end of being.

*Granada, Nicaragua, February 2008,
Dunajská Lužná, May 18, 2008*

Translated by **John Minahane**

Total Eclipse

-- The solar eclipse, Miss?
-- Why not? How much?
-- These special spectacles are one hundred.
The event itself is free.
In our zone it lasts two minutes.
-- For that my ordinary sun specs are sufficient.
Surely some darkness falls and it is over.
-- Except that it is noon. A chill is felt,
birds cease to fly, snakes hide
in holes, a wind springs up. Dear lady,
the shamans know how to make money from it.
They say: Turn away or else
you'll go blind! And to injure yourself
is blasphemy...
-- Today nobody falls for that.
-- If even a single ray
falls on your retina, you're blind, believe me.
-- That's panic talk. You want to make a profit ...
-- Remember Perseus! Only mirrored
in his silver shield was he allowed to view
Medusa's frightful hideousness...
-- I know. I am descended from her. I'm
Eclipse and I am only passing
through this zone,
leaving behind me
a shot of shudder...

Mons, 2 August 1999
Dunajská Lužná, 11 August 1999

Worms Do Not Smell It

The worm under the electron microscope is wriggling
and wriggling.
It proves the scientist right. "We've lengthened its life
by 40 percent." A tired voice, red eyes.
"It'll pay for it by being uninterested in mating and
it will have no sense of smell."

"Life on Earth originated only once. The worms
were here
before us. We are related to all creatures."

The faithful worms know this. They're already
looking forward to their relatives. Even if
they can't smell us. Even if we hadn't lengthened
their lives. They mate in order to be ready.
To be here. Even if we live longer
than is decent. Indecent humans
who can smell life.

Still Life with Dead Hare

The babe cries in the stuffy stable.
King Herod's henchmen comb the thickets.
The god of beasts flies through the woods,
howling in lairs and circling over shrub.

The crunch of high boots... the hare behind the veil
runs like an arrow in his dream... "How was your
Christmas?
Got a stag?" "A doe. Over there, at the chateau."
A muted pop-pop – like a champagne cork

this night. Spots in the snow like red lipstick
of an unhappy woman. The snout turns rigid,
forever beyond fear. The boots hastening
towards the patches. "Here you are, my dear."

A wind springs up. The god of beasts
makes his way through the snowflake lances...
He carries along a soul, warm and tiny.
He'll pray for it to God... Any chances?

You Asked Her

For Corina in Transylvania

*... and that I mustn't kiss you and that I mustn't sleep
with you....*

Vladimír Holan (She asked you...)

You were sitting with a girl by the swimming pool
(a butterfly's flight away from the sea shore),
you'd once more read her poems about transparent
beings "between worms and birds"
and were asking her soft lips and dark eyes:
"You're like a Pasha butterfly on a pin.
Why don't I feel fatefulness in your poems?"

She wanted to tell you: "The fact that you are,
that is my fate, that, too...
You who yearn to kiss me and pour your sorrow
into me,
you who don't suspect that at night I'm a cocoon,
a larva,
that until morning I drag my wounded wings
through mud and puddles of unshed tears
till under a fierce sun I turn into
a creature with a honeyed voice with a light blouse
under which sing breasts unfondled by anyone..."

She fell silent. You raised your head from her verses
and only saw
a big butterfly with black eyes and a bright blouse.
It leaned its wing against the breath of your horror
and the wind caught it and slapped it towards the sea,
to the Orient's larvae, butterflies and birds.
It was singing, believe me, that butterfly, singing
honey-sweet,
but you'll never learn what it was singing about.

(From Unpublished Poems)

The Things Around Me

remind me that I belong
more to death than to life.

Photographs covered by earth
or swallowed by the flames of the furnaces.

Chairs with their seat stuffing torn
as if Death had sat on them for years,
patient, with an icy back.

And books, whose stories
someone took with him on his transport
– only the shells of the letters remaining.

The things around me ask:
*how did you die, where did you all, wordlessly,
go when you left us, without trace, to join your...*

I am not yet ready
for this conversation. A little afraid
to listen. And not to listen – even more.

.....

Translated by Ewald Osers

"Sensuality, absurdity, irony, and an insistence on values of the personality in social relationships: all this in Richter merges with the consciousness of his Jewish experiential background. At the same time, as a European intellectual of the 1990s, Richter demonstrates his resistance to men in power, irrespective of their disguise."

Knut Ødegård (Norwegian poet and translator)

MILAN RICHTER (1948),

poet, dramatist, essayist and translator, has published nine volumes of poetry since 1973, e.g. *Safe Place* (Bezpečné miesto, 1987), *Roots in the Air* (Korene vo vzduchu, 1992), *An Angel with Black Feathers* (Anjel s čiernym perím, 2000) and *Secrets Wide Open* (Tajomstvá dokorán, 2008, selected and new poems). He also wrote two theatre plays: *Kafka's Hell-Paradise* (Z Kafkovho pekloraja, 2006) and *Kafka's Second Life* (Kafkov druhý život, 2007). His poems have been translated into 32 languages and volumes of his selected verses published in 10 countries, including Norway, Israel, Spain, China, and Macedonia. His dramas have been translated into 7 languages and published in Spanish, Serbian and Bulgarian magazines. Milan Richter has translated more than 70 books and plays from several languages, including the selected poems of Emily Dickinson, R. M. Rilke, Harry Martinson, Pablo Neruda, Ernst Jandl, Ernesto Cardenal, Kjell Espmark, Knut Ødegård, Pia Tafdrup, Gerhard Kofler among others. In addition he



Photo © Author's Archive

has translated the collected poems of Tomas Tranströmer, Oscar Wilde's and H. C. Andersen's fairy-tales, the novels of Artur Lundkvist, John Cheever, Lars Gustafsson, Rolf Hochhuth, Franz Kafka's aphorisms, works by Dag Hammarskjöld, Jostein Gaarder, Khalil Gibran, as well as Goethe's *Urfaust* and parts of *Faust I, II*, the dramas of Elias Canetti, P. O. Enquist and others. Richter has worked as an editor and freelance author. In 1993–1995 he served as head of the Slovak Embassy in Norway, accredited for Iceland.

From autumn 1995 until the end of 2002 he was director of the SLOLIA department within LIC. He founded the *Slovak Literary Review* there and was its chief editor until he left LIC in late 2002. He was a Fulbright Research Scholar in 1990 (USA) and Goethe Scholar in 1984 and 2011 (Weimar, Germany). From 2000 until 2011 he organised the Ján Smrek Festival. In 2001 he launched his own publishing house MilaniuM. Richter is a member of the Austrian writers' organization, Grazer Autorenversammlung, of the Bjornson Academy in Norway and of the Central-European Academy on the Border. Since 1998 he has been a member of several international academies, juries and organisations. Richter has received prizes and awards for his translations in Slovakia, Austria and Sweden. In 2002 he was awarded the Golden Order of Merit for the Republic of Austria, in 2008 the Norwegian Royal Order of Merit – knight of 1st class, and in 2010 he received the prestigious Bjornson Prize in Molde, Norway for his literary work.

Daniel Hevier

THE FUNDAMENTAL ADMINISTRATOR

The Second-hand Bookshop

I like visiting second-hand bookshops. Once, in a vulnerable moment between sleep and waking, I heard someone command me not to forget the second-hand bookshops, whatever my hurry and stress. I can't help it. I've got it in me. If I don't get to visit a second-hand bookshop every so often, I feel guilty. Maybe I'll be asked about it when I depart from this earth: And how many times did you visit a second-hand bookshop? I try, I try. Lately, for example, I discovered a second-hand bookshop hidden away in a remote corner. It must have been quite new, though that's an uncommon turn of affairs in connection with old books.

I went inside. There was only one customer there. Plus the bookseller. I can pick out a second-hand bookseller at a hundred metres. I mean, the genuine article. He who carries his vocation within him like a ruinous disease. This fellow was at an advanced stage. I knew he would never free himself from this spell to the very end of his life. He would die an anti-quarian. I began fondling the books. As you know, I'm an epicure. I can hold the dough between my lips, as in the Chinese poem. When I notice A Book, I don't hurl myself on it like a famished peasant. I pass it by, circle it, delaying that moment, protracting delight.

It was a new second-hand bookshop, still in fermentation. Not yet stocked with the proper fish. They were still being born under stones, in darkness and travail. My hunter's hands were not dismayed. They knew that one has to lie a long time in wait for the prey. I picked up one book, so as at least to buy something. Leaving a second-hand bookshop without a book seemed to me immoral.

It was then that I caught the glance of the other fellow. An inconspicuous type. If he was a customer, he was that fair-day marksman whom we, the passionate

Nimrods, sincerely despise. My-oh-my, the fellow said, it's hard...

Immediately I translated his my-oh-my. It meant he was mocking the owner. You chose a bad occupation. The flowers won't bloom for you here. This business won't do much business. All that was implied in his heartless hearty ejaculation.

The bookseller looked at me unhappily. I understood. I knew that our honour was at stake. Plunging into the shelves, I pulled out dust-laden books, piled them in armfuls and, when there was no more room under my arms, on the counter in front of the bookseller. His defeated expression would not erase itself, so I added more, laying brick upon brick... Count these up for me, I said bounteously to the bookman. He began entering the sums on the till with a resolve that looked like acceptance of suffering.

I paid him with the hundred euro note which was supposed to cover my son's school fees and my car's servicing. He didn't give me much change.

Triumphantly I looked round for that alien person, but he had already gone. When leaving he had said something to the effect that he'd stop by again.

I waited until we were alone and then I said to the bookseller: Well, what? We showed him, didn't we? Just in case he might imagine we're some sort of paupers. You and I.

The man was sitting in his chair and still disconsolately holding the hundred euro note that was now his.

Do you know who that was? he said, crushed.

And then it hit me. Idiot that I was! The other man was an extortionist trying to put the squeeze on the wretch. He had more or less given up hope, because he could see that this shop wasn't overflowing with money, when I burst in upon the scene with that stupid pride which has caused me so many problems in life. And now the mafioso would submit a report to his boss and the second-hand bookshop would be put on the contributing list.

And it occurred to me that I ought to go there every month and surrender a hundred euros at the counter.

"These texts are not really short stories. I wanted to write these texts as if digging with a piece of glass into old walls."

Daniel Hevier

The Reader

My phone rang. I went numb. More and more often I don't feel like picking up telephones. Over the phone unknown individuals and institutions are giving me tasks and instructions which I do not want to and cannot fulfil. I let it ring off and sullenly listened to the pealing of the silence that ensued. Then, I don't know why, maybe to find assurance in something indefinable, I picked up the now mute receiver.

Ah, finally, a voice from it said. I thought you'd never lift the phone.

I had not previously had to deal with such a sophisticated approach.

This is some mistake, I said, trying to rescue myself, but in vain.

No mistake. It's scientifically proved and statistically founded. I am your reader.

I emitted a sound supposed to express gladness, joy, goodwill, but there must have been a special corner reserved in it for detached routine.

My self-love was stronger, however. After all, I'm an author of the second rank on the book market who's nearing his last gasp; I can count my readers on the fingers of two hands.

I'm delighted. It's good to get to know you this much at least, over the telephone, I said, spinning the shopworn phrases into the receiver.

You don't understand me, said the unknown at the other end. I'm your reader.

But of course, you've told me already, I interrupted him grumpily.

... and you are my writer, he concluded.

That sounds logical. My famed irony came through in my voice.

I see that I have to explain it to you, my reader said. According to a study being financed by a certain international company, there is a definite number of readers in Slovakia. This number has two distinctive characteristics: it is numerically limited and relatively stable. In plain man's language, there aren't an awful lot of people who're still able and willing to read –

I've noticed that, I mused.

On the other hand, the number of people who profess to be authors or writers is also a settled magnitude, the unknown continued, and I realised he was some kind of nut. Or I had become a performer in one of those mindless shows which are proliferating, where they look for unknown people so as to make asses of them before the whole nation. They must have been hard up if it was my turn now.

... and in some mysterious way these two factors

are equal, the fellow continued, unwearied.

Which two factors? I didn't understand at all.

I'll put it more simply, so that even you can understand – the number of people who read, let's give them the working title of readers, is constantly decreasing. The number of people who write, for present purposes let's call them...

... writers, I said wittily.

... excellent, I see you're beginning to find your way in this, the man said. The number of writers, then, is constantly increasing. Mathematically it was clear that these two magnitudes would in time even out. And we're at that point now: the number of writers and readers is equal. That means, my dear sir, that in our country there are precisely as many writers as authors, ergo...

Ergo? I stupidly repeated, as if doing my part in reciting some charm.

... every Slovak writer has one reader, the lunatic declared neutrally. One reader.

That's not a lot.

On the other hand, it follows that each reader has one author. I took the trouble

of finding out and I learned that my writer is none other than you. That's why I'm ringing you.

Hold on, I said, irritated. Is someone making these matches?

A certain international company... the fellow began, but I cut in on him.

Fine, fine, I'm glad we've got acquainted, thus far at least, by telephone...

No, you don't want to understand me, the voice at the other end interrupted, this time sounding sharp and impudent. From these statistical data certain consequences follow for us two. I am your reader, your only reader – and you are my author, my only author. I might have imagined Mitana or Vilikovský, but it turned out to be you. We two have certain obligations towards each other.

... And... what kind of obligations? I stammered. My God, why am I always the one who gets connected with lunatics?

For me, it follows from this that I have a duty to read your works. And for you...

For me what? I shouted in a squeaky voice.

You should stop as soon as possible... the fellow said, and now it was clear: this was an order.

Resistance made no sense. I was sitting with him and telling him tales. Clearly, according to the findings of the international company, reading had become such a sybaritic extravagance and marginal activity that it was no longer profitable to print books. Yours would be read by one person precisely. Your reader.

And now I knew mine. An unremarkable little man. But, as I've said, I'm not in the premier league myself

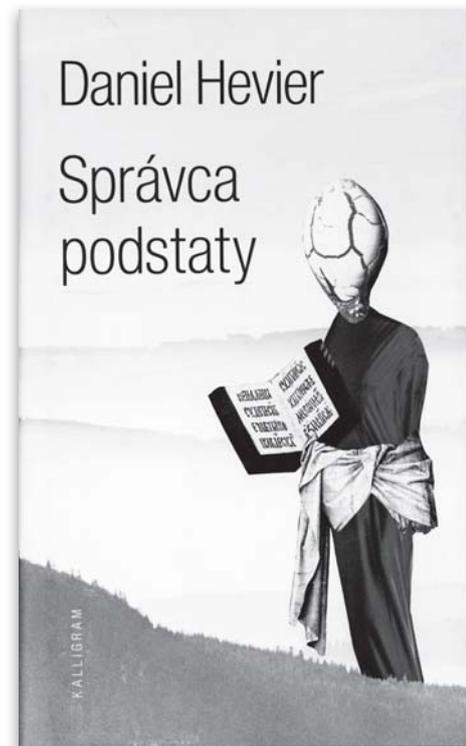
"But don't you dare steal this story from me, because I'll kill you."

either. All the stories I had experienced, heard, seen, I'd told them to him. And now I would not try to escape. The little fellow was unpleasantly thorough. I had become his captive Scheherazade, who saved her neck by telling stories. And I'm always awaiting the moment when another narrator will increase the number in this department.

Because the international company is doing further research. I'm not stupid; there's no stopping megatrends. It's clear to me that the people who are writing will soon outnumber those who are still reading. Two writers will correspond to one reader. I look forward to you, dear colleague. But don't you dare steal this story from me, because I'll kill you.

Translated by **John Minahane**

The book *The Fundamental Administrator* (Správca podstaty) was published by Kalligram, Bratislava, 2011.



DANIEL HEVIER (1955)

is one of the most ubiquitous figures in Slovak literature being simultaneously a writer, poet, author of children's books and translator. He has worked as an editor, translator, and teacher and has run an independent publishing house Hevi since 1991. Hevier is also well known for his song lyrics for numerous popular Slovak singers, and scripts for drama and radio plays. In his early years he devoted himself to poetry and prose mainly for children. Among his works *Butterfly's Merry-Go-Round* (Motýlí kolotoč, 1974), *In the Garden with My Father* (S otcom v záhrade, 1976), *The Bird Drinks from the Rut* (Vták pije z koľaje, 1977), *Birds in Dance* (Vtáci v tanci, 1978) he foreshadowed his characteristic style full of literary games with words, letters and meanings. He brought a new stimulus into Slovak poetry in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century and became one of the leading young poets.

The most successful of his early prose works was the book *Where do Ice Cream Men Go for Winter* (Kam chodia na zimu zmrzlinári, 1984), which was translated into



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several languages and awarded with the IBBY Honours List diploma in 1986. Hevier has also published books in the so-called fantasy-entertainment fairy tale genre, like *Aladár and Baltazár on the Merry-Go-Round* (Aladár a Baltazár na kolotoči, 1990). In his books, he also tries to incorporate important social issues, like drug abuse or the issue of homelessness. Recently, he has mainly published various prose books for adults. His first novel, *The Book that Will Happen* (Kniha, ktorá sa stane, 2009), was a unique attempt at

a highly original work in Slovak literature, the book including hidden intertextual references and textual plays. The work reflects the author's passion for books and provides for various forms of writing, ranging from fairy tale to rap. The plot is based on a numerical symmetry with four narrators, including three men and a woman. Another figure is the Town, with its hidden topography. His second prose work book for an adult readership *The Fundamental Administrator* (Správca podstaty, 2011), consists of several texts which, according to the author, are not really short stories, but rather texts produced as by "digging with piece of glass into old walls". He tries to restore the original and creative potential of the narration by playing with, perhaps not unrealistic, but possible alternatives.

Hevier is truly one of the most original and influential authors in current Slovak literature, and has been awarded numerous prizes for his literary work. He received, among others, the Trojruža prize (1994) for his lifelong production of literature for children, and the prize of the Slovak Writers' Society.

Juraj Šebesta

VENUSSHA

(Hard Week)

Extract

Sunday Lunch

When I returned home, my parents didn't notice anything about me, my brother was enthralled with his laptop. But as soon as I turned on my computer, out spewed a bunch of smile signs and questions for me such as 'Could you send me your chemistry assignment? What did you have for lunch?' That was it. I turned off the computer and, just to be sure, my mobile as well. It was good that I hadn't told anyone about my date. It was even a shock to me.

We sat down to have some soup; father had his serious face on. I thought that he would make some sort of speech since it was my birthday.

"As you know, a serious situation has occurred in our family," he caught me off-guard. "We have certain debts we need to pay. This requires a rationalization for every..."

"Don't start with that now," Mum said peacefully.

"...item. For example, food. It would be enough to eat up everything you are given," he said, turning to me. There was a bit of soup left, but I can't stand cold, greasy water. I grumbled something and faded out again.

"Let's think more about the others here too. We could all eat from your portion."

My brother put down his cutlery angrily. I had to adjust, as Mum would say.

"We live above our means. I have thought it over. Even in our situation, we throw away all kinds of food."

BROTHER: Dad, at least during Sunday lunch...

FATHER: Always the same thing, full circle. Unfinished yoghurts, dried-out cheese, yellowed farmer's cheese, tons of old bread...

BROTHER: But that's normal. What's the problem?

"We could eat over at our relatives' more often," said father. At that one, Mum started choking big-time. My brother, as if with great care, comically thumped her on the back.

"Yes, more eating out as guests," father picked up the pace. Mum wanted to say something, but she was still choking.

FATHER: If each of us went one by one, then we could each bring something home. We could get something for the children and the children could have some take-home containers with them...

Mum tried to get a word in edgeways, but she lost her breath all the more.

"Very funny, Dad," said my Big brother. "What if you found a job instead?"

Father just looked around silently. That comment seemed a bit harsh even to me.

"What are you saying, there's something coming up for father," Mum finally stopped coughing. "Those are just jokes of his, I hope."

Branislav grimaced into his plate. The worst thing of it all was that all this devouring of his family was not really a joke, I know him well.

I helped Mum clear up the plates and we brought out turkey cutlets with mashed potatoes and plum compote. Father has to fry schnitzel every Sunday so that my brother has enough protein for the whole week. In Trenčín, they probably get used up faster, since my dear brother eats up five cutlets at a lunch sitting.

During the second course, I dumped the info on my parents. It did not seem at all to me the wrong timing, just the opposite in fact, because of those debts. But my parents started off all the same. "Do you know how dangerous that can be?! It's just crawling with deviants there!" My parents are hypocrites when it comes to sex!... My brother can have a calendar on the windowsill showing people from ancient Greece fucking! (He went to Crete last year with his friends. He saved up part and got something from our parents for graduation and final exams – Dad was still working then.) Right on the front page, there is a curly Greek kneeling, stark naked, who has the legs of some stark naked Greek woman draped over his shoulders: she has only a necklace on... He is holding her beneath her breasts by the waist, you can even see his penis which is getting ready for action. And they don't mind this at all!

My Big brother calmed my father down by saying that this was serious business and that he had checked everything out, but even Mum was raging, "There is no way that you are going to do that! How old are you?!"

"You know I want to help you!" I said. "I need to have my own money. Some events are abroad. And finally I'll be able to take an airplane!"

"I have good news for you, let's go on vacation," father announced.

"Where? You're still in debt," I woke from my shock.

"Greece. Granny gave us a lead. All-inclusive."

This puzzled me. And my brother was goggling his eyes too.

"I can go too?" I asked, just to be sure.

Father nodded. "Rhodos. All we'll do is feast and then splash around in the sea with bulging bellies."

MUM: Cram down melons and pineapples. Goats cheese with olives.

BROTHER: What about me?

FATHER: You already did your own guggling last year in Crete, didn't you?

BROTHER: Huh! (a moment later) It is really all-inclusive?

FATHER: It is ultra all-inclusive. We have the say-so from Granny's friend. Lindos Princess. You stuff yourself from morning until evening, the same goes for the bars on the seashore. When the canteen is closed, the bars are open. And vice versa. And they fill up the mini-bar in the room double-quick every day.

BROTHER: Do you know how much a vacation like that costs?

FATHER: I have an idea of the costs, based on yours. And? At least we should enjoy ourselves once in our lives.

Mum nodded her head in uncertainty.

"Because of a single week, you're going to go into debt even more? How will you pay it off? It's irresponsible!" I could see that Mum was starting to agree with my brother. I wished my parents the holiday, since it seemed to me that both of them were on the verge of collapsing.

BROTHER: That's right. You'd better forget about it right away. A week at the cottage is free and what's more, you'll actually save if you eat that green stuff of yours.

FATHER: They have good prices on now. Granny's going to back us with the money. It's already been agreed.

Then we explained to them my stuff; it seemed to me that my brother had calmed them down. But father wanted to personally come along. Apparently, he had to go everywhere with me, to all my competitions, even ones abroad. Otherwise, he would not give the go-ahead. I really did have a good motivation - that casting-modeling agency was tops. When they chose a person for some silly billboard paid for by those mobile phone companies, etc., the person got decent money. I would happily give some of it to my brother too. I would have to, because unfortunately, I had promised him. For him to help me carry out my plan.

"Don't get angry, but it seems extremely wrong to me for such a young girl to be working for an agency like that," Mum tore into me again. "What will people think of us?"

"There's nothing to it, Mum. They're just going to photograph me and offer my services that way."

"Services?? What services??"

"For whatever, for a film..."

"What film???"

"A normal film. Or for television or dubbing work, whatever."

MUM: No way!

"After all, I'm already in the drama club and I want to move ahead in those circles! Besides, some of these jobs are very well paid! But if you don't want me to, then who cares. I'm not always going to fight with you for everything."

All was quiet.

"What do you mean 'paid'?" Father asked.

"For example, a commercial. You say something, you smile and immediately, you have a few hundred. Maybe even a thousand."

FATHER: You don't even have an account. You'd have to have it sent to ours...

"I'll open one for myself. Then I'll give you a percentage. After all, it's clear that you are my parents and that you take care of me and so on. At least you would be able to pay back those debts faster."

MUM: ...I don't like this. Children

should study and not be flopping around at auditions. What will people think of us?

BROTHER: Don't worry, I looked into it. It shouldn't be anything bad.

"Did she promise you a percentage too?"

"He can open up an account for her too, that's true," said father. "There's probably nothing we can do about it. Let the girl have a go at it, we can always pull her out later on."

"Thank you, Daddy. My other girlfriends also do the same thing. You can call their parents."

"I don't agree with this. I don't like it."

"Mum, do you want to ruin my career?! What if I am selected for a soap opera or a television series..."

"First of all, you have to go to school. How would you have time to shoot the soap opera anyway?"

FATHER: How much do they offer per episode?

MUM: (addressing father) CUT IT OUT!!!

"Really, Mum, I'll give you half of all of my royalties..."

BROTHER: (carefully) That's quite a bit...

MUM: I'm not interested in any royalties of yours.

BROTHER: Maybe twenty percent would be enough...

FATHER: Don't you worry about that...

I ran off to my room and came back with my old yellowed wallet. Artificial leather, like a pencil case. "Here, this is for your debts. At least it's a start. Or for a vacation.



I don't have to go with you. Just you two go."

My parents looked at each other; I saw that they were starting to like my suggestion. They could go on for days signaling to each other like that. It still worked for them. Recently I caught them... But I am not curious about that at all.

My brother just goggled his eyes, since I had refused to loan him money a few times. And even now I was trying to fool with my wallet. In reality, I had the money in another place. Because, when he sniffs out where the money is, it seems to him, very strongly, that it belongs to him and he'll calmly walk off with it. That's his downside. Then he realizes what he has done, and he is willing to talk about paying it back, etc., but the cash itself is already gone.

Mum looked at the decent pile of banknotes in my hand with astonishment. Three hundred and ten euros to be exact. "You're a good girl, Lucka, but that's your money. You'll need it for a new computer or for a school outing..."

"I'll earn more."

FATHER: Keep it. We appreciate your good motives. How did you save up so much?

I was a little taken aback and then I overdid the honesty again. That happens to me. I did not want to betray everything, especially not Uncle Laco. So in the meantime, I said, "I've been saving up for a long time. Part of it I received, part of it I earned..."

"Good for you. I thought that you were working for free there..."

"You shouldn't be taking money from them," said Mum, but happily they did not keep going. I hope that they will not ask Sasha's father. I sometimes help him out

at that zoo of a shop of theirs. Like...thanks for supporting Lucia, they will be all nice to him, and he will just stare at them, wondering what they mean. And then he will go and ruin it all by saying something like, 'But I have to thank you that she can help me out here for nothing.' (Once Mr. Kuruc gave me five euros, right. I did not want to take it either, but he was fencing so much with his hand for me to take it that I got a headache. He is the type of guy who has no shame and will eventually just put it in the person's pocket. So then I bought some fish off of him right away. So...)

Translated by **Clarice Cloutier**

The book *Venussha. Hard Week* (Venussha. Ťažký týždeň) was published by the Edition Ryba Publishing, Trnava, 2011.



JURAJ ŠEBESTA (1964)

is a writer for adults, as well as for children and teenagers, and is an editor and translator. A characteristic sign of his work is an attempt at "pure" language, which means that he tries to avoid the use of phrases and clichés. And so one finds lot of slang, dialect and even vulgarism in his texts. His books are humorous, funny and paradoxical at the same time. Šebesta does not want to be part of any literary trend and always tries to stay himself. His publishing debut came in his forties with a collection of short stories *Sobriety* (Triezvenie, 2005). The stories talk about the loss of illusion in various aspects of everyday life, and have the recognizable influence of absurd literature. His second book, a novel *When a Dog Smiles* (Keď sa pes smeje, 2008), brings the author's effort to peculiarize the usual and



Photo © Pavol Funtál

humdrum with humour, irony and hyperbole. Even though the book can be defined as a family novel, the key role is played by a dog, which helps to solve some of the family problems. Juraj Šebesta's latest novel *Venussha*.

Hard Week (Venussha. Ťažký týždeň, 2011) is a comic-book novel with the illustrations of Katarína Slaninková. The book, intended mainly for teenagers and for their deploring parents, is a free continuation of Šebesta's previous book. This time, the story is seen through the eyes of a thirteen year-old girl, Lucia, who faces various challenges in a tough week from Monday to Sunday. This hilarious family comic book is appropriate for teenagers, as well as for adults. The dog Gismo helps the family again this time. Juraj Šebesta has received several literary awards, including the Prize of the jury in the Povedka (Short story) 1996 competition, the Bibiana award for best book for children and young people in winter 2008, and a nomination among finalists of the ANASOFT LITERA award in 2009.

Pavol Rankov

MOTHERS

(Extract)

SAMORUB

(Russian argot, self-infliction, or a self-harmer)

The trees that grew deeper in the forest were much coarser and tougher. It was an unimaginable ordeal, chopping a mighty hornbeam. The axe leapt off it like sparks from a flame. By now my belly was sticking out quite a bit and I lived in the constant fear that I myself would injure the fruit that was growing inside me. A couple of times it happened that the axblade ended up striking my knees. Even in excruciating pain, I gave thanks that this tool of ours was so blunt. It was also unpleasant if shavings or a fragment of bark flew into my eye. The convict woman I was chopping with would have to take it out. But only at a moment when the guard wasn't looking, because it was strictly forbidden to stop work of one's own accord: there was an immediate threat of reduced rations. Once I cut my thigh with the axe. The wound bled for a few more days, but I didn't even think of reporting the injury. The result might have been that I'd end up in prison as a malingerer. Irina would enjoy sending me there. She didn't bother her head about any doctor's paper giving relief for pregnant women. Even when the food was being doled out she sometimes sent me to the rear for no reason at all. She didn't need reasons.

– There won't be a supplement, – she declared, and so it was.

The days when the commanding officer accompanied us to the forest were the worst, because the guards, too, were anxious to show their vigilance in front of her. They feared Irina even more than we did. In the prisoners' feelings towards Irina, fear and hatred were combined with gratitude. Something I encountered almost every day was that some convict would describe the horrors of life in the Zone or in some other camp where she had been previously. For her the Artek was paradise.

– They took me off when the Russians occupied the Baltic lands, – the Estonian Kaisa, whom Irina gave me one day as a workmate, whispered to me. – To begin with, I found myself in the Kolyma, at Elgen. First of all the soldiers raped me, when the train stopped at a station. Afterwards we got to the camp and the very first day two guardsmen raped me. They were in a hurry to get it done before I went to the barber. Of course, they got more

pleasure doing it with a long-haired woman than with a bald-headed spectre.

Kaisa smiled, but immediately she fell silent, because the guard turned in our direction. Always, while chopping with my axe, I was furtively sizing up Kaisa. I didn't understand how she could even talk about such things. I would not have survived so much degradation and shame, but she was recalling all those details with that odd grin of hers, as if she were laughing at someone, possibly herself.

– And then the first night the Turks came, – Kaisa went on, when the guard turned. – Lunatics, total animals. Defend yourself? Looking at that band, you wouldn't even dream of it. One fellow was doing it to me down there, but his hands were free, so he battered me till I lost consciousness. I don't know how many of them changed places on me. And I wasn't the one who came out of it worst. They killed one girl from our village. Just to heighten the pleasure... In Elgen too there were two fences, like in Artek. We used to dry our washing on the inner one. Just like here. Once there was a new guard on the tower. His first day on the job he wanted to be extra vigilant. And all of a sudden he saw how one convict went up close to the fence and finally stretched out her hands to the wire. So he shot her. The misunderstanding was cleared up, and from then on the new guard knew where the wet clothes were hung.

Kaisa's eyes sought out Irina.

– I have to be grateful to her. Strict, but fair. Obey her commands and don't think about them, because thinking's useless. You wouldn't ponder the commands of your own mother... And now step back, so that it doesn't fall on you.

The tree ought to have toppled already, it just needed a few more blows. The trunk had already crackled and split gradually, as if giving up its life, but it still hadn't fallen.

– Well, I'll give it to you! – Kaisa said in a temper, and began chopping again. – Believe me, in the Zone you'd have been trembling day and night for your bare life. Here you've got a hope of staying alive till the next amnesty. And I'm telling you, only because of Irina...

At that moment the tree seemed to leap to one side, it flew from the stump and came crashing down with unexpected speed and a mighty racket. Not the usual

“If every mother has to love her child and must fight for their happiness, are there limits which she may not cross?”

Pavol Rankov

swishing, it was a rending and a horrible din. Kaisa jumped, but the tree seemed to be aiming for her. I thought I saw it make one more change of direction and crash right down on her. When the trunk whacked against her temple there was just a quiet cracking sound, as if wood were splitting. Kaisa's head was forced between her shoulders. For another fraction of a second she kept her footing, but then her knees buckled and she dropped beside the felled tree. Her headscarf remained in place, tied neatly under her chin.

I didn't even manage to cry out. As in a dream, I was still drowned in the noise of the falling tree. It whirled in my head in endless echoes.

Again and again I prayed to the Lord for someone's life, their survival, but not for the woman lying by my feet but for my child, who, terrified by the falling tree, had begun to kick desperately.

Then finally I forced myself to kneel beside Kaisa. I had no idea what to do. I stuck a hand under Kaisa's blouse, to feel her heartbeat. When I couldn't feel any, I pressed my ear to her face. I hoped I would hear breath, but instead I saw a thin trickle of blood beginning to leak from her nostril. Then powerful hands shoved me aside. It was Irina. She squatted down to Kaisa. First she shook her vigorously, then bent close to her face and loosened her headscarf.

– She's not going to get up again, – she declared.

A number of the convicts and overseers had gathered round us. They looked questioningly at Irina. She rose, gestured with her head, spread out her arms, but did not speak. It was another of those moments when she wanted

to speak but could not find words.

I kept telling myself that I must not look at Kaisa any more, even when I was looking at her one more time. The impact of the tree had deformed her strangely. Her head was, in a way, compressed on one side, and her neck was shortened. The blood had stopped trickling from her nose, but it was flowing from somewhere else under her temple. Two women took off Kaisa's blouse and covered her face with it. Irina watched them silently. Then she seemed to realise that someone had dared to do something which she herself had not commanded, and now it was time for her to regain the commander's initiative.

– Well, what about it? Self-inflicted, – she pronounced. – Self-mutilation's no big event.

She ordered us to return to work. The convicts slowly shuffled off to their places. The guards uncertainly headed off after them.

When I was alone with Irina, I asked her what I should do. Irina looked at me uncomprehendingly, but her surprise quickly turned to anger:

– Your work, what else? Pick up your axe! You're not getting out of the forest till you've cut all the branches off that tree!

How could I carry on working in that situation? Lying not far from me was the body of the woman who had lately been teaching me that it was possible to survive this hell.

Translated by **John Minahane**

The book *Mothers* (Matky) was published by Edition Ryba, Trnava, 2011.

PAVOL RANKOV (1964),

writer, university lecturer, dramaturge, debuted with collection of short stories *After Some Time* (S odstupom času, 1995), was awarded the prestigious Ivan Krasko Award for the Debut and in 1997 he received the Jean Monnet Premio Letterario Internazionale. In 2001, another collection, *Us and Them/Them and Us* (My a oni/Oni a my) followed and in 2004 another, *In Close Vicinity* (V tesnej blízkosti) was released. Rankov published his first novel, *It Happened on September 1, or Another Time* (Stalo sa prvého septembra, alebo inokedy), in 2008 and it was awarded the European Union Prize for Literature in 2009. *Mothers* (Matky) is his next novel, published in 2011. It deals with the sad chapter of Slovak history – the abduction immediately after the end of WWII



Photo © Author's Archive

of innocent people designated as traitors and enemies of state to the Soviet Gulags. *Mothers* is the story of a young woman, Zuzana, accused of betraying her lover, young Russian partisan, Alexey, to Nazis and deported to a Gulag. There she gives birth to

a baby boy and, despite the harsh conditions, the baby survives. The author depicts the daily struggle for survival in a camp of desperate women from various social backgrounds. The story ends after the amnesty granted to foreign convicts following Stalin's death in 1953. The woman from Slovakia can finally return home but her son becomes a Soviet citizen wearing a red pioneer scarf around his neck... The story of the young mother and her Gulag-born son is told sixty years later by the mother herself. She is interviewed in the research, using the oral history method, of a student who is writing her thesis on motherhood in extreme social situations. The main theme of the novel *Mothers* is not the Gulag, but motherhood and a mother's relationship to her child in extreme conditions.

Márius Kopcsay

HAPPY MEMORIES FROM MY SCHOOL VACATION

(Extract)

8.

There is only a minimal probability that a person in Central Europe will contract the AIDS virus. As long as he does not inject drugs or does not inject himself with homosexuals. From a geographical point of view, Ukraine is dangerous and Odessa especially. Daddy certainly slept with Central European heterosexual women, but what if one of them had already slept with a homosexual drug addict from Odessa? You cannot rule out anything in today's world, nothing is impossible, since the former inhabitant of the fuzzy sweatshirt that zips up, that has a *cipzár*, zipper in Hungarian – Daddy and husband – find himself on the skewed, sloping, but otherwise very pleasantly erotic, crooked platform called life.

I enter the church where a beggar is out front viciously clattering his crutches and cents or maybe still hellers in a dirty hat, I do not remember any longer, My Little Son, what currency we were using at the time and which one we will use in the future. My granny always used to say, her whole life long, that there were *pengő* in Hungary. I found out about this currency thanks to the rare, inflated banknotes with the value of "one million *pengő*" and I boasted in front of my classmates that I was a millionaire and maybe I would still be today if I had been able to cash those tattered and dirtied banknotes, if I had not lost so much on the many moves, moves are always more a losing than a finding of home.

Daddy lives through the summer vacation in agonizing uncertainty, wondering whether he caresses you with infected hands, if via those kisses of his, he is not perhaps transferring to you the deathly dangerous micro-organisms that scurried mischievously into him via mucous from strange ladies. He thought back to the help center for HIV victims that he had seen in the foreign city, a giant red ribbon gleamed right on the building's façade, around which he trekked in an empty tram, he himself emptied after the first sinful night of his life. As if, in this respect, fate was flinging in his face all the possible results of his recklessness through the dusty, vibrating tram windows. And a black ribbon will soon also adorn Daddy's photo on your small table, My Little Son, when you set it up next to your men made out of Legos and your spelling book.

Daddy is wriggling on the bed, he is all wet, scrunched up, sweaty and slippery with his restless sleep, he wakes up and takes a drink from the bottle, meanwhile you, My Little Boy, peacefully breathe in your children's bed, it is already light outside and the birds, with their sprightly song,

announce that everything which is alive is once again a bit closer to its death.

Exceptionally, Daddy has breakfast, usually he only drinks coffee, but today he is fortifying himself with whiskey so that he can drown his doubts and pangs of conscience in this transparent, soapy drink, yes, even in the face of Mommy. He travels with the morning bus to see a white-capped lady who pulls up his sleeve and injects a needle into his quivering arm, fortunately, she does not investigate the level of alcohol in his blood, but maybe they will squeeze out of Daddy, in addition to the ethanol, at least a few molecules of that red fluid so that they can control the volume of the death-bearing virus so that Daddy can know the outcome the following day.

(...)

"Here you go," the nurse hands over the certificate of no-HIV-infection in a mechanical manner to a kneaded-up Daddy, or at least that was how he understood it, given his frame of mind. Right there in front of the hospital, Daddy drinks up the rest of the whiskey, climbs a tree and cries. The tears water the ground which is already wet from the summer rains and storms, in the sky, thunderheads grow into fanciful, baroque forms, it is sultry outside, as if it is no longer possible to move or breathe in this world, as if the oxygen supply has thinned out, Daddy should be happy that he is healthy, healthy, healthy, he wanted to call the Journalist, then his Nurse, but ultimately, he gets together with Mommy, does not even know why, but he just has to, he has to come clean with her in his spirit because of all his sins and believe the illusion for a few minutes that they have ceased to exist, that they have disappeared from the world. That since they have fallen into the past, that they simply are no more.

(...)

10.

"I have to tell you some important things," I once again say urgently to the Nurse.

"Sorry, today I don't have time, I have patients all day long until the evening," she says. So she has patients, huh, let's see, if only I could get a peek through the chink in the wall into that examination room of hers in the Rose garden, but just imagine if I would stoop to that level of snooping through chinks, I am fundamentally against that. I am off to the Christmas market, I will buy you some kind of toy there, My Little Son, some sort of little man on strings, eventually

I will not even be able to wait until Christmas and I will tell you of this happy news right away on the phone, but then it seems a little strange to me that you are the one picking up Mommy's mobile.

"Mommy's working on something on your computer," you explain to me happily, while Mommy's hands are cleverly opening notes with strange addresses, seeing that they have succeeded in clicking their way into my inbox.

"This is absolutely it between us," Mommy announces to me when I come home with an unhappy hunch that suspends my blood circulation.

"Come on, that's only fiction, just thoughts, just a game," I blubber.

"You treacherous traitor, you cheat," hisses Mommy. "How could you do this to me?"

"I haven't done anything, they're just words," I answer firmly and lose my balance, the bottle of Hunter's liquor suddenly, unexpectedly swerving towards the sideboard.

"And stop that drinking, it's horrid!" roars Mommy, tearing my friend the Hunter's liquor out of my hand and pouring its contents outside the window.

"Good god, don't shout," I shout at her.

"Just look at yourself!" Mommy jabs at me, I am unable to fend her off.

"I have been faithful to you all these years, for twenty years now," I defend myself.

"And what have I gotten out of it, what?" shouts Mommy.

"Try to think about why it happened," I take the offensive. "What our marriage is like."

"Are you trying to say that you have not been happy up until now?" says Mommy.

"Never, I have never been happy with you," spills out of me and I wait for these words to have a self-reflexive effect on Mommy, but instead of that, Mommy turns red and

starts to punch me with her fists.

"How can you say something like that to me," she screams, then irritably puts down the fur coat, breaking its hook to hang it up by, hastily grabs her purse and sets out into the frosty night air.

"Get out of here, you viper, take a walk," I shout out after her.

"You're just a common dick," she calls out to me even though she is already on the street, but with my left hand I am already tapping out an sms, please forgive me and come back, a beeping sound is heard in the kitchen, Mommy's mobile lights up on the table, I look to see if she has me saved under the nickname of 'No-Pick-Up-The-Phone' or flat out 'Dick,' but 'Milanko' comes up.

Translated by **Clarice Cloutier**

The book *Happy Memories from My School Vacation* (*Veselé príhody z prázdnin*) was published by Kalligram, Bratislava, 2011.



MÁRIUS KOPCSAY (1968), prose writer, scriptwriter and journalist, made his debut in 1998 with the title *A Critical Day* (*Kritický deň*), a collection of short stories where he is dealing with his childhood and adolescent memories of the drab life during the communist years. The book has been awarded The Ivan Krasko Prize for best debut. Kopcsay continued to deal with this topic in his next collection of short stories, *Lost Years* (*Stratené roky*, 2004), on a higher, more mature level. In 2005 he published his first novel, *Home* (*Domov*), which takes place in the 90's. It is a straightforward story of a hero unable to pay his debts and it begins with moving into a new flat, and with it to a new life of new, usually worse and more



Photo © Author's Archive

depriving life situations. Similar in its voice is his next collection of short stories, *Wasted Life* (*Zbytočný život*, 2006). Both the books, as well as following novels *Mystifier* (*Mystifikátor*, 2008) and *Bear Rock* (*Medvedia skala*, 2009)

were nominated for the prestigious ANASOFT LITERA Prize. His latest prose work is a collection of short stories, *Happy Memories from My School Vacation* (*Veselé príhody z prázdnin*, 2011). The stories form a whole, with two longer texts ("Mr. Bang-Bang" and "An Instant Life"), to create a compact longer piece of prose which is linked by the main hero, a person who is put to the difficult test and thus suitably frustrated – as is so often nowadays the case. This lends an ironic subtext to the theme of school holidays. Functioning as a potential point of departure, unpleasant reality thus becomes more bearable as it is taken simply as new material for additional literary elaboration – as the author does here with his stories.

Svetlana Žuchová

DIEBE UND ZEUGEN

(Leseprobe)

1.

Wirklich. Ich wollte wirklich nicht stehlen. Ich wollte mich nur wie ein richtiger Mann um meine Frau kümmern. So lernen es die Kinder in der Schule. Natürlich wäre es schöner gewesen, mit Lohn nach Hause zu kommen und Schokolade mitzubringen. Merci oder Lindt. Irgendein hübsches Schmuckstück, notfalls auch Modeschmuck. Ein Armband aus Muranoglas wie es den Touristen an den Souvenirständen angeboten wird. Es wäre schöner gewesen, wenn ich sie jeden Fünften im Monat zum Abendessen ausgeführt hätte. Wir wären auf der Terrasse einer Pizzeria am Kanalufer gesessen und hätten uns eine Pizza geteilt. Meinetwegen auch eine vegetarische wie Marisia sie mag. Es wäre schön gewesen, eine Flasche Weißwein zu kaufen und auf dem Weg von der Pizzeria in der Videothek vorbeizuschauen. Jeder würde lieber so ein Leben wählen. Ein ganz gewöhnliches. So gewöhnlich, dass es in Wirklichkeit vielleicht gar nicht existiert.

Ich weiß gar nicht mehr, wann mir das letzte Mal Lohn ausgezahlt worden ist. Wann ich das letzte Mal ein Bündel Banknoten in meinen Händen hielt, die wie gebügelt aussahen. Von einem Bankkonto gar nicht zu reden. Ein Bankkonto gehört zu jenem normalen Leben, aus dem ich unmerklich herausgerutscht bin. Allmählich, wie ein Kind, das aus seinen Stiefeln wächst. Nicht von einem Tag zum anderen. Nicht absichtlich. Gleitend, so wie die Dämmerung kommt. Und so war es auch mit dem Stehlen.

Damals, als Marisia sagte, dass sie nicht kochen kann. Gleich als wir uns kennengelernt haben. Als wir das erste Mal gemeinsam frühstückten, und ihr das Spiegelei auseinander lief wie eine Pfütze nach ausgiebigem Regen. Wie der heiße Schlamm am Grund einer Thermalquelle. Ich saß bei ihr im Wohnzimmer und sah mich in dem mir unbekanntem Raum um. Damals hatte sie noch die gemeinsame Wohnung mit Gregor, und wir hatten alle eine Arbeit. Wir befanden uns auf einem guten Weg. An diesem ersten Morgen, als mir Marisia, halbnackt, den Teller mit dem zerflossenen Eigelb und den weißen Fetzen brachte. Zerstückelte Eier wie Raureif. Wie dünnes Eis,

das in der Sonne silbrig glänzt. Sie kratzte die Eier mit dem Kochlöffel von der rostigen Pfanne und brachte sie als Häufchen ins Wohnzimmer, wo ich auf der Couch saß und ihr Hilfe anbot. Aber Marisia wollte keine Hilfe. Sie sagte, sie wolle kochen lernen. Sie sei Vegetarierin. Sie aß stets im Kindergarten und kaufte sich für den Abend eine Pizzaschnitte. Am Stand an der Ecke, wo die Türken Hühnerfleisch im Semmel und in Eisenpfannen geröstetes Fleisch verkauften. Und Gemüsepizza, die sie jeden Abend auf dem Heimweg mitnahm. Denn sie sei Vegetarierin und kenne sich bei Fleisch nicht aus. Aber jetzt wolle sie kochen lernen, lachte sie an diesem Morgen, als wir zum ersten Mal gemeinsam frühstückten. Sie werde kochen lernen und mir alle Wünsche erfüllen. Wie eine richtige Frau ihrem Mann.

„Wenn wir schon kein Bankkonto hatten und schwarz in einer fremden Wohnung hausten, mussten solche Rituale existieren. Die Rituale, die ein normales Leben ermöglichen. Oder zumindest dessen Anschein.“

Sie kochte dann wirklich viel. Die Küche roch nach angebranntem Öl. Wir lüfteten oft, weil Gregor die dicke Luft störte. Damals wohnte er noch bei uns, hatte sich aber die meiste Zeit in seinem Zimmer eingeschlossen. Dann wollte Marisia, dass ich Fleisch mitbringe. Sie kenne sich bei Fleisch nicht aus. Sie erzählte mir, wie sie einst von ihrer Großmutter zum Fleischer geschickt worden war. In einem Land, das wir nun Heimat

nennen. Sie sollte ein Karree oder Bauchstück mitbringen. Von vorn oder hinten. Sie lachte über den Fleischerjargon, der ihr nichts sagte. Darum bat sie mich, ins Geschäft zu gehen. Ich sollte etwas Gutes aussuchen. Ich war froh, dass ich ihr helfen konnte. Und nahm Geld mit. Damals hatten wir nämlich noch Geld, obwohl ich schon lang kein Bankkonto mehr hatte. Eigentlich nicht mehr, seit ich gekommen war. Es hatte damit Komplikationen gegeben. In der Bank wollten sie Papiere und Bestätigungen. Borko, mein damaliger Chef, zahlte mir ohnehin bar auf die Hand. Wir brauchten gar kein Bankkonto. Aber Geld hatten wir damals noch. Ich arbeitete ja auf dem Bau und jeden Freitag nach der Schicht zahlte mich Borko aus. Er rechnete die Stunden für die ganze Woche zusammen und holte aus einem Metallkoffer ein Bündel Banknoten, die von einem Papierstreifen zusammengehalten wurden. Sie sahen aus wie gebügelt. Wie das Geld, mit dem die Kinder Einkaufen spielen. Die Finger glitten über steifes Papier, denn Borko hatte das Geld von der

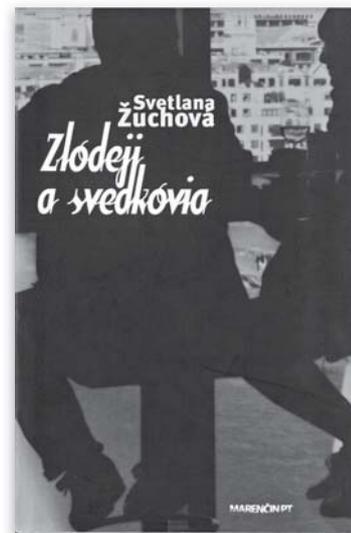
Bank. Von dort hob er es für uns ab und brachte es in einem Metallkoffer mit, der mit einer Zahlenkombination versperrt war. Jeden Freitag nach der Schicht, wir hatten uns umgezogen und warteten ungeduldig eine rauchend vor dem Baucontainer. Wir konnten es kaum erwarten, bis Borko mit dem roten Helm die ganze Baustelle kontrolliert hatte und zwischen den Mischmaschinen und Kalkbehältern mit dem Metallkoffer in der Hand auftauchte. Das Geld steckte ich dann, in der Mitte gefaltet, in die hintere Hosentasche, so wie früher, als ich dort das Stanniolpapier von der Schokolade aufbewahrte und mit meinen Fingernägeln glättete, bis es biegsam wie Blattgold war. Dabei dachte ich immer an Marisia. Und zu Hause breitete ich die Banknoten wie Spielkarten auf dem Tisch aus. Es waren so viele, dass sie gar nicht alle Platz hatten. Sie überlappten sich wie die Schuppen eines exotischen Reptils. Wie farbige Dachschindeln. So fand sie Marisia, wenn sie ins Zimmer kam. Marisia, die mit Geld sehr vorsichtig war. Sie fragte mich immer, ob mich Borko nicht betrüge und ob er die Stunden richtig zusammenzähle. Ob ich mir auch Notizen mache, damit ich ihn kontrollieren könne. Ich versicherte stets, dass mir Borko jede einzelne gearbeitete Minute zahle. Ich zeigte ihr den Taschenkalender, in den ich wirklich jeden Tag die Anzahl der Arbeitsstunden eintrug. Nicht, dass ich Borko nicht vertraut hätte. Aber da ich kein Bankkonto hatte, wollte ich zumindest den kleinen Kalender haben, der sozusagen meinem Leben Ordnung verlieh. Solche Dinge sind nämlich wichtig. Hinten ein Verzeichnis der Bekannten mit Adressen und Telefonnummern und bei jedem Monat Anmerkungen, wer Geburtstag haben werde. Bei jedem Datum die Anzahl der Arbeitsstunden und bei jedem Freitag der Lohn, den ich nach der Schicht von Borko bekommen hatte. Obwohl ich noch

kein Bankkonto hatte, besaß ich zumindest den kleinen Kalender. Ordnung im Leben und Marisia, die Kochen lernte.

So war es jeden Freitag. Ein abendliches Ritual. Ich verteilte die Banknoten von Borko auf dem Tisch wie Spielkarten und versicherte Marisia, dass keine einzige fehle. Wir freuten uns sehr über das Geld. Wir liebkoosten es. Wir zählten es und teilten es in kleine Stöße auf. Zusammen mit dem Geld, das von der letzten Woche übrig war. Denn Marisia bestand darauf zu sparen. Sie wollte, dass wir die Banknoten und Münzen in die Blechbüchse für den Tee steckten. Das Geld, das vom einen Freitag zum nächsten noch übrig war. Die grüne Blechbüchse war unsere Bank.

Übersetzt von **Simon Gruber**

Das Buch *Diebe und Zeugen* (Zlodeji a svedkovia) erschien im Albert Marenčin PT, Bratislava, 2011.



SVETLANA ŽUCHOVÁ (1976)

studierte Psychologie und Medizin in Bratislava und in Wien. Ihre ersten Geschichten publizierte sie in verschiedenen literarischen Zeitschriften (Rak, Romboid, Vlna, Dotyky). Im Jahre 2002 debütierte sie mit der Geschichtensammlung *Dulce de Leche*, für die sie vom Literarischen Fonds prämiert wurde. Diese Sammlung enthielt ihre ersten Versuche mit Geschichten. In den Jahren 2001 und 2005 erreichte sie das Finale des Literaturwettbewerbs Poviedka 2006 erschien ihre Novelle *Yesim*. Es handelt sich um den Monolog einer Komponistin. Ihre Flucht aus einer Situation in eine andere, von einem Ort zum anderen ist die bewegende Kraft in ihrem Leben. Der Zwang, von sich zu erzählen, führt sie zu einem Therapeuten. In ihrem neuesten Roman,



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Diebe und Zeugen (Zlodeji a svedkovia, 2011), kehrt Svetlana Žuchová zu den Themen ihrer letzten Novelle zurück. Das Werk dreht sich also um schlüsselhafte Entscheidungen und

die jeweilige aus ihnen resultierende Flucht ins Ausland, wo man allein sich selbst überlassen oder von der Gastlichkeit der fremden Menschen abhängig ist. Der erste Teil dieses Romans spielt in Wien. Dort rekapitulieren vier Immigranten die Umstände, durch die sie zu Dieben wurden. Alle träumen davon, eines Tages ganz normale Menschen zu werden, die im Ausland so wie alle anderen Menschen leben. Die Bemühungen, sich an die fremde Umgebung anzupassen und Entscheidungen zu fällen, die zum Glück führen, bilden den Schwerpunkt dieses Romans. Die Autorin widmet sich auch Übersetzungen aus der englischen und deutschen Literatur. Außer psychologischen Fachpublikationen hat sie auch Theaterstücke übersetzt.

Katarína Kucbelová

LITTLE BIG CITY

1.
 we shouldn't have moved from the Town
 (Leopoldov)

Dad was promoted and transferred to another prison
 (she said)

who eighty three years ago
 (thirty thousand days)

was born in the city
 (on Kapitulska Street)
 in the Town I wouldn't have lost my memory
 because we had family there
 (you talk to each other you refresh memories)

all of them now are under ground
 (she'd have met with the family's children and
 grand-children
 whom she'll never get to know and they're not aware
 she exists)

now I've remained here alone
 (it's seldom that I meet the children of friends)
 this is the worst imprisonment
 (she was thinking of loneliness I think of the loss of
 memory)

2.
 I tried
 to remember

but those names kept
 changing vanishing changing
 their crowds of people that incessantly
 passed through and still pass through the city

with a perfect sense of the present
 they give the impression of permanent residents

(ability of the crowd
 to create individuals
 equal thanks to the single aim
 of distinguishing themselves)

I don't want to stop
 naming in memory again
 but again and again I lose the ability
 to find my bearings in the days
 that pass through the city
 and
 all appear as one
 (according to statistics visitors to this city remain
 on average one day)

3.
 every city
 where I live
 lasts one day

a single-use city

for the second day
 I consume another

a city should be healthy
 clean and recyclable

so that the least possible waste results

so that we have
 a clean and recyclable

conscience when we decide
 to consume another

to throw the last one

in

4.
 days pass through the city
 like images

I pass through the city
 I assemble images
 I assemble the city
 I record it on maps

I pass through the city like days
 I record the days on maps

days as days

images as images
 as I pass from one street to the next
 I decide

how I'll speak what I'll say what I'll do

if

situations pass through the city like days

on the maps I record the situations too

action is
 decision is
 precedent is

images pass through the city like situations

they pass through the city according to the maps

5.
 here I have left my memory

these are remnants
 of the former city
 the city a few days ago

it is covered with other cities as upper floors

memory that depends on chance
 may be revealed only
 in the building of a future city
 its creators are buried
 on the next underground level
 memory that depends on the memory of others

6.
 my memory will grasp nothing
 the ivy tendrils remain powerless

a concrete wall is immune
 to the organism of the urban plant

tones of grey surfaces are impressive from on high
 two-dimensional transitions
 between vertical and horizontal

synapses
 transposed by the mobile
 shadow

my memory has nothing to grasp

maybe I forgot the essential
 information which would
 reveal in the disposition

of surfaces

the aim

maybe the information awaits me
 around the corner
 I would have found it
 if I had managed

to go up the slippery vertical slope
 but it is not certain if
 it's there
 or
 how I would afterwards
 climb

down

it's never certain if I am fully
 inside

it's not certain how many floors are below me

I don't remember which
 the car is parked on

the lifts are full of people
 passing through

the number of floors surprises me

someone stepped on my foot

I'm never the one
 who presses the number

maybe that's precisely what's wrong

this way I won't stumble
 on
 the information round the corner

if it were there
 they'd trample it

the propagators

select buy and go

they know that nothing awaits them
 they know which floor they're parked on

they themselves await no one
 accustomed to the dry urban storms
 they do not hear what
 the thunders say

they do not distinguish
 between exterior and interior

they do not await another day
 they know it will arrive and they'll be able
 to choose for themselves
 their nearest ones

to choose and buy
 that right other
 and new
 day according to
 their needs and thoughts

they need not seek
 but avoid

learn get rid of
 find

simple shapes and outer sides

alternation
 of grey surfaces

Translated by **John Minahane**

The book *Little Big City* (Malé veľké mesto) was
 published by Ars Poetica, Bratislava, 2008.

*"I try to compose the text in such a way that it will
 take the reader to places where perhaps he has
 never been."*

Katarína Kucbelová

KATARÍNA KUCBELOVÁ
 (1979), poet and film editor.
 She made her debut with the
 collection *Duals* (2003), followed
 by *Sport* (2006) and *Little Big
 City* (2008). Selections of her
 poems were included in the
 anthology *The End of the Line,*
*The Arc Anthology of New
 Poetry from East and Central
 Europe* (2004) and *Slowakische
 Anthologie* (2006). She organises
 the Anasoft Litera Literary Festival
 and the ANASOFT LITERA Prize.



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Zuska Kepplová

DUMPLINGS IN GOTHIC TATTOO

(Extract)

Anka, London Muv po polsku!¹

“Muv po polsku!” The guy leant over the table and yelled right in Anka’s face. She caught nearly everything he said. Which was, more or less: “Talk Polish! Don’t pretend you’re from over here. I have eyes and ears, you’re one of ours, so don’t talk English to me, d’you hear?” This guy had been looking for work for a few weeks now. He was living in a basement flat with the Czech *zedník*² Jan, the Czech *opravář mobilních telefonů*³ Pavel, and two jobseeking girls from Poland called Olya and Iga. Those two spent half the day busily scouring the net and checking ads. They’d write down contact details, make dots and crosses on a torn map, and set off for town. Always together. They’d agreed that one of them wouldn’t find work without the other. Pavel would always arrive at the same time, shut himself up in his room, open a beer and call his girlfriend for hours on some hacked phone account. Jan would arrive a moment later, switch on the telly and fry a few Tesco value products mixed up together on the pan. All of them bought whatever came in the red-white-and-blue line, “ve farbách našich vlajek”⁴, as Jan said. For the sake of order they wrote their names on everything in the fridge. Pavel even marked his milk bottle. He had an idea that Jan was pouring some of it in his Nesca.

Anka knew all this very well, because until quite lately she’d been living with them. Sitting on the worn couch, she used to switch on the telly. She cooked in a pan where the Teflon had come off and incipient rust was turning all of the food reddish-brown. She used to browse through mags that Olya and Iga bought so they could read first-hand about British celebrities. “Victoria Beckham mi še nepodoba!”⁵ Olya’d say. “David Beckham mi še podoba”⁶, Iga’d say. Anka moved out when she found work at the local job centre. She’d gone along to enquire and straightaway they planted her in the office.

The situation changed, suddenly she had papers and someone was willing to look at her degree. Translated, signed, and stamped in confirmation. Right then Anka had seen the Virgin Mary on her screen saver, opening and closing her cloak to bless her, with a halo of twelve stars over her head. That was the end of cycling from the station with her cash in her rucksack! Suddenly she had her own cup in the kitchen and, working from a table in a warm dry office, she was helping to harmonise the supply and demand of jobs.

“It may seem that Anka, in spite of everything, might have done anything and everything in London.”

She had helped the Pole Jacek with accommodation. He’d been totally lost. Even to get to the job centre took him two days. He had the right street name, it was just that instead of going to the *street* he went to the *road*. The road was at the other end of London. He

was quite worn out with the bus journeys by the time he arrived at the wrong place. In three hours’ travelling he could have gone quite a distance from Warsaw. To the mountains, or towards the sea. Here he’d only gone a couple of zones. The buses, after all, were cheaper than the underground. He was sorry he hadn’t prepared a sandwich of soft toasting bread for the journey. At a Turkish buffet he pointed at the revolving spit and received a large *eat here* kebab, on a plate. Since he didn’t know a word of English and was scared besides, he paid out an idiotic sum for a huge portion of meat, and he had to leave the left-over behind, not having learned to ask for a *takeaway* and preferably without onions. “Tolik? To dělá Tesco value nákup na týden, když si chci lahodit!”⁷ Jan would have commented.

On the second day Jacek arrived at the right office. Behind the table, Anka could sense him sweaty with a mix of newly-landed immigrant’s funk and yesterday’s onions. A Slavic moonface looked at her, blue eyes with colourless lashes. The thought passed through Anka’s head how varied the forms of ugliness are. Some for the English and others for the Poles. Those she called turkeys, these potatoes. One lot were red through unpigmented skin, as if they were angry. The other lot seemed to be eternally ashamed. When she pointed to the *address* column, which he hadn’t filled in, Jacek said:

“Nemieškam”⁸. So she rang Jan to tell him they needn’t look any longer for a flatmate, and she directed Jacek to her previous address. From then on he thought Anka would be his guardian angel. However, when she hadn’t been able to find work for him after a couple of weeks, he was quite desperate. This week he’d have nothing to pay the rent with and Jan would tell him, “No jo, na dvorku polský ambasády je prý docela hezkej trávník, pučím ti stan.”⁹

“ Muv po polsku!” he yelled, when Anka was explaining to him that without English they wouldn’t even take him on a building site or in a warehouse, and certainly not behind a till. “And what do I need to say behind a till? I say *hello*, I scan in the shopping, and then I ask *Plastic or paper?* and I give them a bag! How can I not be able to do that, when any fat black woman can do it?!” Anka understood nearly everything. Her granny was one of the Goral borderers, and she herself used to go every summer with her mother to the fairs in Poland, and in winter she taught groups of Poles to snowboard on the Tatra slopes. The desperate command “ Muv po polsku!” made her burst out crying. Her colleague from the table beside her removed Jacek from the office, pushing him out beside the queue of people waiting in front of the building and shouting some sort of warning at him in South African English. Anka went to make tea in her cup with the *Think pink* wording. She sat at her table and tried to continue normally. The whites of her eyes were scrawled with red veins and her voice trembled, accentuating the Slavic intonation. The words were soft and sticking to one another; she couldn’t bring them out properly. She had to repeat every sentence twice. On the phone someone asked angrily, “Am I the fucking last British person on Earth?!”

In the evening she opened her umbrella and went out onto the street. The large black woman sitting on the front steps hissed at her: “You Polish crap!” Anka didn’t even look at her, she tightened the straps under her chin and buttoned up her jacket.

She was thinking that over in the Tatras this rain would be snow, and she’d only be staying here for a while and afterwards, thanks to the pounds she’d saved, she could go to the slopes with new gear. During the year she’d worked, during the snow season she taught Poles to snowboard. Very soon the London fog would take the form of a board, shoes, jump suit and goggles with coloured glass through which everything looked pink, even in the fog.

Tate Gallery blues

“Routine is a rosary beads. Only pagans get bored”, Anka’s grandma used to say. After coming to London she tried quickly to build up a new daily routine. It began when she opened the door of the flat: having inhaled one breath of air, she was resolved to get out of there as soon as she could. She put down her suitcase and bag in the room allotted to her. There was nothing in it, only a bed, a wardrobe, no shelves, and a mirror with a stain beside it. The suitcase banged on the floor and the bang hit her in the form of an echo. All that could be heard besides was the sound of the telly, as Olya and Iga strove to understand the British idols. Anka had already introduced herself to them all. Between putting down the suitcase and tomorrow’s hunt for work, there was a time slot which she didn’t know how to fill. Up to now everything had always been more or less clear. Now she was facing the stain on the wall, the grey bedcovers, and a heap of free time.

She knocked on Pavel’s door. Their rooms were adjoining, and the muted sound came through to her of endless dialogue on the London-Ostrava line. Plus the stink of cigarettes. Anka asked him for one and went out to sit at the front of the house. On a bench with a view of a motorway. The house might have been the very last one in London. Zone Six, beyond there were only trees, fences and roads. Anka imagined she saw a black horse go by, with a gentleman in a cloak upon it. “Když sem poprvé přišel po půl roku domů, chtěl sem si vyšetovat na to spláslé břicho švabachem BUCHTY”¹⁰, Jan said once, when they were sitting together on the bench drinking canned beer. “Poslouchal sem Landu, nenáviděl černochoy, Angličany, Pakistánce a miloval svou maminku. Pak sem přišel domů, přežral sem se buchety a musel letět naspátky, protože mi nedali dovolenou. Jěšte sem měl

práškovéj cukr u pusu, když se letadlo zvedalo.”¹¹. Anka found Jan’s *průpovědky*¹² tiresome, but she caught him round the shoulders and hugged him for what he said about dumplings. They clinked their cans. Two more, and Jan was exhibiting his desperate desire to stroke her dumpling. Anka stubbed her cigarette, patted his head and went back to her room with the stain on the wall. Next day on the net she found another place and moved out within a week. Closer to work. Away from canned beer and thoughts of Mamma. The evening when Anka was packing, Jan put on Landa at full volume, and afterwards he called his mother from Pavel’s phone with the credit that never ran out.

On the way to her new flat she was soaked through. She flung down suitcase and bag on the floor. Water seeping from the suitcase made a stain on the wall. That’s the last desperate gesture, she promised herself. *Think pink!*

“The whites of her eyes were scrawled with red veins and her voice trembled, accentuating the Slavic intonation. The words were soft and sticking to one another; she couldn’t bring them out properly. She had to repeat every sentence twice.”

Next day she didn't go straight to her flat after work, instead she crossed the bridge to the new Tate Gallery. "Vstupy do muzea jsou tady povědčíně zadara. Chod' se kouknout, já to už všechno viděl,"¹³ Jan had said on the bench. Anka fitted her free time unconstrainedly into the vast industrial building. She walked from floor to floor, reading all the notices, had coffee, and came again next day. When she ran out of exhibits, she changed the gallery. She knew that if she didn't go to one, what awaited her was a room with a stain and fellow-tenants who grilled sausages on Sundays on a supermarket trolley.

On the paper wraps that protected her hand from hot coffee she wrote messages to herself and hung them on the notice board over her table in the office. *I love challenges! Think outside the box! Just keep on keeping on! Step by step and smile (if possible).* Beside that she collected postcards and leaflets of all sorts, to put them on the wall of her room. Invitations to events, disco flyers and artists' cards. They covered over the stain on the wall and dulled the echo. She considered going to a football match with her colleagues at the weekend, to find out if Beckham really was *her type* or not.

Why It's Good to Have a Pass for the Underground

It may seem that Anka, in spite of everything, might have done anything and everything in London. She didn't have to avoid the barbecues in the yard and she didn't have to buy Tesco value food. Once she even told herself that. She went, not to the Tate Gallery, but to Sainsbury's, and there she bought some really good sausages. She told herself that she'd stand in line for the till and here – in the best supermarket, where behind

the tills there were no black women with an uneven number of fake nails, where the Brits, as they should be – freckled and in striped suits – were shopping, she would feel well. She wouldn't be flaying the skin off her lungs trying to make the maximum saving.

"She no longer knew how good people and bad people behaved, her intuition wasn't functioning, and here she was standing and looking, looking, and all she could do was hope that she'd manage to keep a sharp lookout, because everybody at home said it would be best to keep her eyes peeled and check everything."

Barbecuing is no big deal. They have wood in bundles at the petrol pumps and in supermarkets. It's not like when someone focuses the house design on the idea of having a grilling place because it's chic. Here the barbecue is at home, even among newcomers from South Africa such as Anka's new housemates. In a small Victorian house in East London – where the buildings violate the most basic rule of feng shui by having steps before the door that no money will stay in the building – in just such a little house she had a ground floor room. To have a room on the ground floor was thumbs up, because there was another room in the basement

which had no windows and where nothing ever dried. The other rooms were inhabited by South Africans who spoke ridiculous English and still more ridiculous Dutch. They were as white as if they'd come from the flour-mill. The men had workers' boots powdered by cement placed before the doors and the women had a few pairs of uniform-style white blouses in the wardrobe. They all ate frozen products and each had a shelf for them in the fridge. Each had a day reserved for washing. There was a drying frame in the yard that looked like a burnt tree, but (since there was a dryer above the washing machine) the hands that it raised to the heavens were empty. The tenants would sit around beneath it on plastic chairs, smoking and stamping out cigarette butts on the grass.

A little further on, passing over concrete blocks one came to a paved area, where the Tesco trolley stood. This

ZUSKA KEPPOVÁ (1982)

studied dramaturgy and screenplay writing at the Academy of Arts in Bratislava and is a doctoral candidate at the Central European University in Budapest. In 2005, she won the main prize in the short story competition *Poviedka*. In 2011, she published the debut *Dumplings in Gothic Tattoo* (Buchty švabachom) which earned her a nomination for the prestigious ANASOFT LITERA 2012. Characters of this book are new



Photo © Author's Archive

nomads, immigrants with unlimited possibility of return yet restless in the search for a place they can call home. Where is it, with whom? Dexterously written and smoothly readable, Kepplová's debut is a faithful attempt to capture experience of adventurous twenty-something who left to taste the world. This volume is a habile reflection on contemporary themes such as city, double-citizenship (or rather 'homelessness') as well as postsocialism and feminism.

trolley served as the grill. Anka placed her Sainsbury sausages alongside her housemates' bangers and steaks. She decided to offer them these elegantly pale spiced sausages. Some time between her deciding this and going off to transfer her clothes from the washing machine to the drier it happened. Anyhow, it was Tesco sausages that she put on her plate, so she never found out how the Sainsbury sausages tasted.

Next day she was standing before an enormous sculpture in the Tate Gallery's entrance hall. She no longer knew how good people and bad people behaved, her intuition wasn't functioning, and here she was standing and looking, looking, and all she could do was hope that she'd manage to keep a sharp lookout, because everybody at home said it would be best to keep her eyes peeled and check everything.

She'd do better at keeping her eyes peeled over some of the local beer. It was Czech beer, one must add in a whisper. She was sitting in a Czechoslovak pub and hoping things would be clearer here, the bad people would be bad and the good ones good. One had to separate them out by a road full of unpredictable British traffic (*Look left! Look right!*) But already the word went around that, that she was saving for a snowboard outfit, she'd found work in an office and moved, she was buying Sainsbury's sausages and having coffee in the museum, she had her own cup in *the office*, and at weekends there were barbecues. She was sitting at a table with a chequered washable cloth and her fellow-citizens were asking her where and how she'd found work, whether that work could provide more work, whether she could fit one further bed in her room, whether they didn't need someone for cleaning in her apartment house, whether she had any of those sausages left, and whether she had an original CD for burning, because everyone had already heard everything that would bear listening to. The best would be something of ours or Czech, something with songs of love with heavy metal riffs.

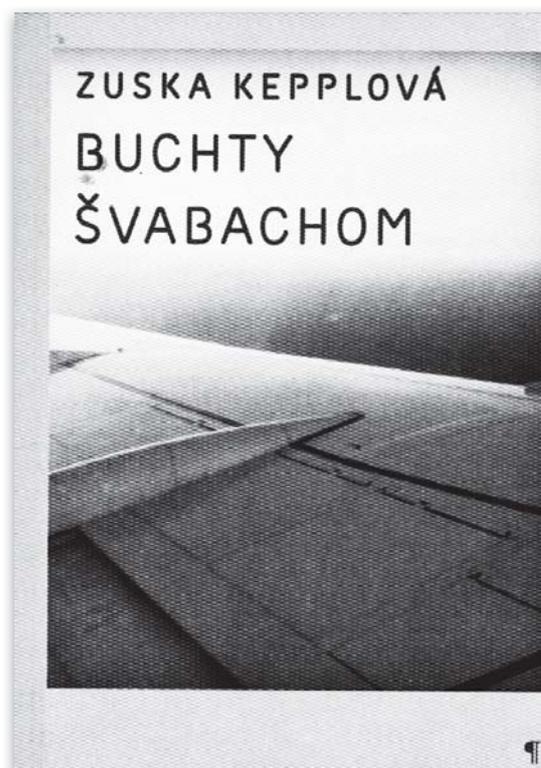
Together with the people from her district, she used to travel back and forth on a free bus which went from East London to the centre. On the way she'd fall asleep from weariness, and when she woke up, a Pakistani mother would be sitting by her feet and breast-feeding with eyes closed, a Chinese man would be dozing, propped against a trolley with T-shirts in packages, and a big black man with his hand raised high, as if he was slam dunking, had fallen asleep before he could catch hold, and two South Africans, leaning against each other with whitening boots and splattered faces, were sleeping. All were sleeping. Anka would wake up in a somewhat different National Geographic, where a little black man did the high jump on glossy paper, a Chinese woman smilingly carried a basket on her head, and an Eskimo held a big fish. She was ashamed to be travelling with people who had flown enormous distances so that here they could stack trays and bang the drawer of a till. Because there was no other way and in the end it was better so. She, after all, was saving for her snowboard outfit! She bought an underground pass and began

travelling by tube. Now all she saw was her house, her office, and the museums. Everything in between, the underground let mercifully disappear. That way her day was a lot simpler. She'd call home and say that she was fine. She was well.

Translated by **John Minahane**

The book *Dumplings in Gothic Tattoo* (Buchty švabachom) was published by KK Bagala a literarnyklub, Levice, 2011.

- 1 Talk Polish!
- 2 Brickie
- 3 Mobile phone repairer
- 4 In the colours of our flag.
- 5 Victoria Beckham's not my type!
- 6 David Beckham's my type.
- 7 That much? That would do for a week's Tesco value shopping, if you wanted to spoil yourself!
- 8 I don't have a place.
- 9 Right, there's a very nice lawn in the Polish Embassy grounds, I'll lend a tent.
- 10 When I first came here six months ago, I wanted to have the word DUMPLINGS tattooed in Gothic scripture onto my flattened belly.
- 11 I was listening to Landa, I hated the blacks, the English, the Pakistanis, and I loved my Mamma. Then I came back home, I stuffed myself with dumplings, and I had to fly straight back because they didn't give me any holiday. I still had the caster sugar on my chin when the plane took off.
- 12 Sententious talk
- 13 Entrance to museums is mostly free here. Go take a look, I've seen it all already.



Zuzka Slaninka

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WHEEL

(Extract)

3.

The next day there was no way I could pick up courage to go out. Although I would much rather have gone off somewhere than remain at home and expose myself to the gaze of my parents. I told them that I had found some new friends and we'd been celebrating. That's all.

I don't know how much they knew and what they thought, but they left it at that. And I was only too glad.

But to meet *those* friends and look them straight in the eye, chat normally with them... Uf, that was impossible just now!

I just couldn't understand myself. I didn't know what to think and do in my situation. It wasn't that I didn't remember anything (which, it's true, I found pretty amazing), but I hadn't quite realised yet that I had gone against everything that had previously been natural for me – a self-preservation instinct or bashfulness.

And then there was another thing that was preying on my mind – Antonko Tristan. Yes, I saw him as a thing, a certain tricky matter that meant quite a lot to me. Especially after I realised that I had no idea as regards the use of some kind of protection. In fact, for my part I had some idea – there hadn't been any, because I had absolutely not planned anything like that in the foreseeable future. I had my Old Crock, and then – somehow I didn't feel the need for it.

As to what he did or didn't use, I had no clue – I'm told there is a difference, but for me it had been the first time, I had been pissed and somehow I hadn't noticed any difference. There was only one thing I could do (for my own peace of mind), and that was – ask. Stupidly and outright – something I'm an expert at.

With a fuzzy mind I was wiping the dishes after lunch when Inga called me and asked if there was anything the matter with me as I wasn't taking her calls. I only discovered that I had missed two calls and one SMS when she at last got through to me.

I looked awful, and I felt awful too, so we agreed that if anyone, then she would come alone. At least for a while. I desperately needed someone to talk to, I needed understanding and some advice. My Mum *is* wonderful, it's true, but sometimes things happen and I feel it would be better to spare her.

Inga and I shut ourselves in my little room and made ourselves comfortable on the sofa. She browsed through the latest issue of DIRTBIKER and meanwhile I answered her question of why I was looking so wretched.

"I can't believe it! *You weren't used to such a ride...* You mean the ride or the *Dvaja bratia* pub?"

"Well... the one and the other, more or less..." I said, attempting a carefree smile, so that I wouldn't look so innocent and fearful, which I did anyway.

"I find it hard to believe you, really!"

"What d'you mean?"

"What do I mean... You managed the ride almost faultlessly... Apart from the speed and so on. But then, a different bike would do it. And if you knew the terrain, it would be another matter, I can see that..."

I looked at her as she put the magazine aside and looked at me sympathetically.

"You know, Inga... There's one more thing I'd like to talk to you about..."

But this time I didn't know how to start. What's more, I had no clue whether she already knew something about it or not, whether *Tonko* was in the habit of boasting, or hadn't mentioned it at all.

"What's that?"

"Tony hasn't said anything?"

She now looked taken aback, which rather surprised me; she thought for a moment and then slowly shrugged her shoulders and shook her head.

"When we left *Dvaja bratia* yesterday... What did you do after that?"

"The aim of the book is to envelop the reader in an atmosphere they will either like or reject. Either they get on a bike and join in, to add their own story to this one, or they jump to the side of the track, cursing the mad riders careering headlong down on them."

Zuzka Slaninka

“Paula, you know very well that we were pissed and we didn’t do anything, until we remembered that we ought to be going home... But you could tell me why you two left earlier!”

All at once she seemed quite irritated and for a moment I doubted whether I could tell her everything. So I kept quiet. Embarrassingly quiet. Then she started crumpling up the magazine and suddenly whispered: “You went to mate!”

I choked.

To mate! Like rats! Like her neighbour’s hares – rabbits?! Actually she was quite right!

“You serious? You with Anton! With that arsehole?!”

“Is that bad?”

“You must know whether it’s bad, for heaven’s sake! You and Anton, just like that! Huh, you fool...”

“What d’you mean, just like that?”

“Well, with him there is no other way, only *just like that!*”

I pondered. No matter how I looked at it, I didn’t regret it. Even if it really was the first and last time. Because I’m stupid, I suppose. Or because of Tony.

“Well, I would never have thought that of you...” Inga muttered in amazement, gazing at a double page that happened to be open.

“But if...”

“What else are you going to tell me?”

“That is... it was the first time...”

She burst out angrily, “You’re dead stupid, Paula, I’m sorry, but I *really do* think that!”

“That means you think we’ve finished before we’ve even started?”

“Well, the main thing is I think that to have sex with that priggish idiot was utterly irresponsible, that’s what I think!”

So they were in the habit of betting who would ride like mad downhill without a helmet and then getting drunk out of their minds in the pub afterwards, but there was only one person who was utterly irresponsible?

But then I understood. This was not some general rule; this was a certain very subjective opinion. And

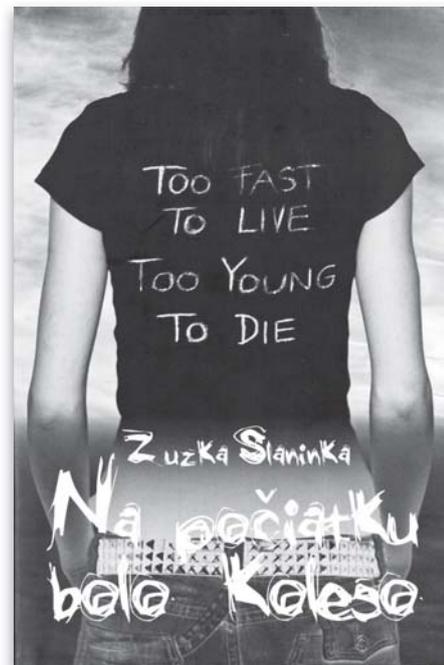
experience. I was flabbergasted!

Again and again she rolled and re-rolled my DIRTBIKER in her sweaty hands and in a strange voice full of some kind of cold loathing, she went on murmuring: “Every tiny little bit of my body, every single millimetre that miserable man touched disgusted me... I didn’t know how to wash it off. I stood in the shower for ages and ages, until there was no water left in the boiler and I had a fit when I began to get an icy-cold shower. But... at least that cooled me down and for the moment I forgot everything,” she finished her account and I really felt quite sorry for her. It must have been awful for her. I respected her for having managed to come to terms with it.

Apparently, she had once been fond of him. He was literally in love with her. The more he loved her, the more she hated him. Maybe one day I’d understand.

Translated by **Heather Trebatická**

The book *In the Beginning was the Wheel* (Na počiatku bolo koleso) was published by Vydavateľstvo Tatran, Bratislava, 2010.



ZUZKA SLANINKA (1992)

In the 2009 Debut competition for authors, her manuscript *In the Beginning Was the Wheel* (Na počiatku bolo koleso) impressed the jury and they recommended its publication. The book appeared in 2010 and became a bestseller. Zuzka Slaninka wrote her very frank story as if in one breath, in the vigorous language of adolescents and it is they who can easily identify themselves with her protagonists. For example, bikers, people on two wheels, lovers

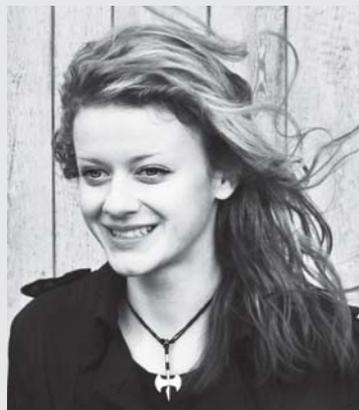


Photo © Michal Slaninka

of long-distance tours, or crazy people who can only really let off steam when riding at breakneck speed down impossible terrain. At the beginning of the long vacation the heroine of the book, Paula, a secondary school student familiar with life on two wheels, finds her place among one such group. In these two months spent alternately outdoors on her bicycle or over a drink in the local pub, she experiences a lot of new things (including the loss of her virginity and other adventures).

Maxim E. Matkin

LA-OLA-WELLE

5. Kapitel

(Leseprobe)

Verona fühlte sich plötzlich müde. Am Morgen bekam sie einen Rappel, schob die Möbel in die Mitte ihres Zimmers, bedeckte sie mit riesigen Seiten der „Pravda“ und ging Farbe kaufen. Es dauerte eine ganze Ewigkeit, bis sie einen einigermaßen tauglichen Farbton mischte, und eine weitere Ewigkeit, bis sie die erste Schicht auf die Wand aufgetragen hatte. Jetzt saß sie im Dreck und Gestank und schaute zu, wie der Anstrich trocknete und fleckig wurde. Es überstieg ihre Kräfte, das zu beenden. Sie öffnete sich ein Pfirsichkompott, legte sich auf die Zeitungen und betrachtete die nasse Decke. Sie begann zu überlegen, ob es echt ein so famoser Einfall war, sie dunkelblau zu streichen, und ob sie irgendwann noch die Energie haben würde, wirklich den Sternenhimmel der Südhälfte draufzumalen.

Sie rief ihren Vater in der Redaktion an, wann er heimkommen wolle. Er war nicht dort. Nur seine Kollegin, eine übertrieben freundliche Kulturredakteurin, die immer einen Lippenstiftabdruck auf ihren Zähnen hatte. Sie sagte zu Verona, er sei schon länger fort, und dass er bestimmt jeden Augenblick heimkomme. Verona wartete, bis es dunkel wurde. Dann ging sie ihn in der nahegelegenen Wirtschaft suchen.

Sie blieb vor den schmutzigen Fenstern stehen und schaute hinein. Sie roch den Gestank nach Bierpisse, mit der die Stammgäste schon seit Jahrzehnten ihr Territorium markierten.

Hör zu, Süße, hast du Zeit? – fragte sie ein Betrunkenener, der sich an den Türrahmen lehnte.

Wie bitte? – fragte Verona.

Ob du Zeit hast, Süße, hab ich gefragt, – sagte der Kerl. – Du könntest dich auf meinen Schoß setzen und ich würde dir meine Lebensgeschichte erzählen.

Ich suche meinen Vater.

Da drin? – fragte der Kerl. – Da drin ist kein Vater. Da sind nur gescheiterte Astronauten, meine Süße. Und ich mit meiner Lebensgeschichte. Dich interessiert echt nicht, was ich erlebt habe?

Ich kann es mir ganz gut vorstellen, – sagte Verona. Vater war nicht in der Kneipe. Er saß sonst immer am Fenster und jetzt war sein Platz leer.

Vorm Haus traf sie den Nachbarn. Er hieß Vratko, war

ein Jahr älter, ging aber in eine Klasse mit Verona, weil seine Jahre schlecht aufgingen. Was es bedeutet, dass einem die Jahre schlecht aufgehen, das wusste Verona nicht, es schien, als sei es ein schicksalhafter Fluch, für den man nichts kann. Aber sie war Vratko für seine Anwesenheit in der Klasse dankbar. So war sie wenigstens nicht die einzige in der Klasse, die anders war. Verona wurde sich der Seltsamkeit dieser Zeit erst bewusst, als außer ihr und Vratko alle nicht geschiedene, verheiratete Eltern hatten, ein bis drei Geschwister, eine Dreizimmerwohnung, eine Oma auf dem Land, eine Wohnzimmerwand und eine Eckbank in der Küche. Ein Kinderzimmer in rot, ein Schlafzimmer in blau, ein Wohnzimmer in braun und eine Küche so farblos oder rot oder dunkelgrün. Alle hatten oder wollten einen Garten und darin einen Pflanzenfelsen, dessen Bedeutung Verona in ihrer Kindheit entging und sie

auch im Erwachsenenalter nicht erfasste.

Vratko saß im Dunkeln auf der Bank, auf dem Schoß hatte er einen Schuhkarton und darin einen Schäferhundwelpen. Sein Vater hatte ihn ihm geschenkt, als er kurz aus Pardubice kam und wieder wegfuhr. Seine Mutter warf den Welpen augenblicklich aus dem Haus.

Wenn ich mal Kinder habe, erlaube ich ihnen so viele Hunde, wie sie wollen, – sagte Vratko.

Ich werde keine Kinder haben. Deshalb werde ich niemanden damit quälen, die Kindheit durchleben zu müssen, – sagte Verona.

Auf den nahegelegenen Bänken saß eine Bande von Achtklässlern. Jemand klimperte auf der Gitarre und sang Heute habe ich eine Verabredung mit meiner Stadt. Es war warm. Durch die offenen Fenster hörte man dieselbe Fernsehinszenierung in mehrfachem Echo. Vratkos Welpen schlief ein. Verona nahm ihn in ihre Arme und brachte ihn an den richtigen Ort.

Terezas und Henrys Mutter begrüßte sie mit Verwunderung, aber sie fragte nicht viel. Sie sagte, sie sei nicht sicher, ob Henry sich über ihren Besuch freuen würde, weil er nicht ganz in seiner Haut stecke. Das tat er wirklich nicht. Er lag im Bett mit verbundenem Bein und reagierte auf gar nichts.

Es waren Zeiten, als man nur selten in die Psychiatrie

„Henry streichelte den Hund und der leckte ihm die Hand. Heute beginnt der erste Tag vom Rest meines Lebens, dachte Henry.“

ging. Jeder hatte genug triftige Gründe zu wüten, dem Alkohol oder der Paranoia zu verfallen, in die Leere zu starren und jeden Abend ins Kissen zu weinen, man nahm es also, als gehöre es irgendwie zum Leben. Manche halfen sich intuitiv und diejenigen, die es nicht schafften, sprangen aus dem Fenster. Die Psychoanalytiker in den wenigen Westfilmen, die zu uns gelangten, dienten nur als Beweis dafür, dass die Menschen schon gar nicht mehr wissen, was sie vor lauter Güte mit sich anfangen sollen. Auch Henrys Mutter vertrat die Ansicht, dass die Zeit alles absorbiere, man dürfe nur nicht zu viel daran kratzen. In Terezas und Henrys Familie war nur ein Cousin zweiten Grades in der Psychiatrie, der eines Tages erklärte, dass uns feindliche Armeen besetzen wollen, auf die Schienen schlug und in den örtlichen Rundfunk schrie, dass alle sich Blei, Forken, Schürhaken, Gewehre und Fleischerpistolen nehmen sollen, um etwas für die Verteidigung des Vaterlandes in der Hand zu haben. Das soll Ende Juli 1968 gewesen sein. Heute würden wir ihn als Hellscher bezeichnen. Damals gaben sie ihm Elektroschocks.

Verona legte den Welpen behutsam auf Henrys Bauch. Er wand sich noch ein wenig herum und schlief weiter. Verona und Vratko gingen fort. Henry betrachtete den Welpen, fühlte, wie er ihm Wärme gab. Und nach einer Weile fiel auch er in tiefen, erholsamen Schlaf. Den ersten nach drei Tagen.

Am Morgen pinkelte der Welpen auf den Teppich, deshalb stand Henry auf, wischte weg, was ging, und humpelte mit ihm davon. Die Sonne stand noch tief, die Luft war angenehm kühl und überall herrschte Ruhe. Henry streichelte den Hund und der leckte ihm die Hand. Heute beginnt der erste Tag vom Rest meines Lebens, dachte Henry.

Am Bürgersteig parkte ein Auto und Bob stieg aus, Leiter der Armeebund-Ortsgruppe.

Ich habe gestern Abend bei euch angerufen und deine Mutter hat gesagt, du fühlst dich nicht gut, – sagte er zu Henry. Aber ich hab mir gesagt, dass ich hier nochmal anhalte, ob du es dir nicht doch überlegt hast.

Was sollte ich mir überlegen?

Ob du mit uns nach Prag fährst. Sie machen dort

solche... Spezialtests für junge Radioamateure.

Darf ich den Hund mitnehmen?

Wenn du in fünf Minuten gepackt bist und mir versprichst, dass ihr mir nicht ins Auto pisst.

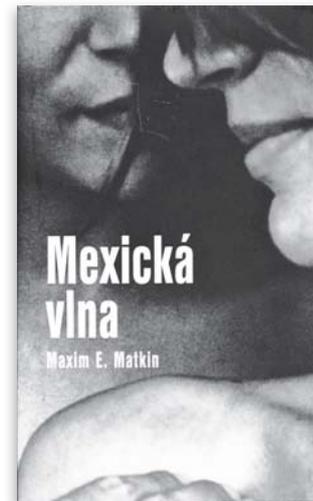
Die Fahrt nach Prag verlief schnell mit Diskussionen über amerikanische Pershings, die angeblich in den österreichischen Grenzhügeln begraben waren, und darüber, was im ORF über Tschernobyl kam. Henrys Vater sagte mal zu ihm, er solle sich vor Bob hüten, und obwohl er es nicht näher spezifiziert hatte, schwieg Henry lieber. Es redeten nur die beiden anderen Radiotelegrafie-Wettkämpfer.

In Prag brachte man sie in irgendein Armeegeäude und setzte sie in einen Raum mit weiteren dreißig Auswüchsen aus der ganzen Tschechoslowakei. Ein großer, grauhaariger Offizier in Uniform begrüßte sie.

Ich bin Ingenieur Oberst Zíma. Und ihr seid die Elite unserer Nationen. Ihr seid das Beste, was uns hierzulande gedeiht. Ihr seid wertbewusst, gescheit und körperlich tüchtig. Jetzt suchen wir von euch Besten die Besten aus. Also strengt euch an. Das Vaterland braucht euch.

Übersetzt von **Veronika Széherová**

Das Buch *La-Ola-Welle* (*Mexická vlna*) erschien im Verlag Slovart, Bratislava, 2005.



Maxim E. Matkin (Pseudonym)

ist ein Schriftsteller, dessen wahre Identität nicht bekannt ist. Ein strategischer Schachzug, spielt doch der Autor mit dem Geheimnis und den Hypothesen werbewirksam sogar im Bucheinband seines Romans *Liebe ist ein Fehler im Programm* (*Láska je chyba v programe*, 2004): „Seine wahre Identität verheimlicht er gewissenhaft. Aber alle wissen, wer er ist, und die Mehrheit von ihnen liegt falsch.“ In seiner Bedeutung kombiniert der Name zwei sichtbare Ebenen. Die erste ist exotisch-mondän, suggeriert eine übernational globalisierte,

kosmopolitische Identität des Trägers. Dahinter verbirgt sich aber eine intellektualistisch-exklusive parodierende Allusion auf das Gründerwerk des sozialistischen Realismus (Maxim Gorki als Autor des Romans *Matka – Die Mutter*). Der Autor tauchte im Jahr 2000 aus den Tiefen des Internets auf, als er im Magazin *inZine* zu publizieren begann. 2002 erschien sein Debütroman *Mitternachtstagebuch* (*Polnočný denník*) und wurde zum Bestseller, zwei Jahre später knüpfte *Liebe ist ein Fehler im Programm* (*Láska je chyba v programe*, 2004) an diesen Erfolg an. Ebenfalls erfolgreich

und von vielen als sein bester Roman gehandelt ist *La-Ola-Welle* (*Mexická vlna*, 2005). 2007 folgten die Romane *Männliche Interieure* (*Mužské interiéry*) und *Liebe mich ironisch* (*Miluj ma ironicky*). Nach einer dreijährigen Pause veröffentlichte Matkin sein sechstes Werk *Ich dich auch* (*Aj ja teba*, 2010). Sein neuester Roman *Nicht für den Mund* (*Nie na ústa*, 2011) handelt von der Suche nach der Liebe im Internet. Matkins Werk ist in der Lebenswirklichkeit angesiedelt, mit einem Gespür für das Seelenleben und die Befindlichkeiten der jungen Generation.

AN ENORMOUS FRESH BREEZE

Interview with Andrea Reynolds

Andrea Reynolds (1969), studied West Slavonic Languages and Literature and History of Art at Leipzig University (D), Masaryk University (Brno, CZ) and Comenius University (Bratislava, SK). Lived and worked as a German lecturer and translator in Slovakia and Great Britain for several years.



Photo © Author's Archive

• **Daniela Humajová:** *Where did you learn Slovak and why have you decided to study Slovak studies?*

– **Andrea Reynolds:** The reason I became interested in Slovak (and Czech) was completely by chance: I gave a lift to a young Slovak woman hitch-hiker one day in the early 90s. We became friends and her friends became mine too in the then Czechoslovakia and that determined my choice of subject when I started University as an adult student – West Slavonic Languages and Literatures along with History of Art at Leipzig University, then Masaryk University, Brno (CZ) and Comenius University, Bratislava (SK).

I started with Czech and initially found it incredibly hard, then studied Slovak as an additional language. The Slovak part became easier after a significant motivation boost to look into Slovak literature initiated and nurtured by Prof. Ludwig Richter. The predominantly Slovak path I continued on I owe to him, and to a few other excellent lecturers like Dr. Ute Raßloff, and then Prof. Valér Mikula and his colleagues in Bratislava.

• **Daniela Humajová:** *You are a writer and translator; how do you see the Slovak literature of the past twenty years? What kind of texts do you select to be translated and what literary genre do you prefer?*

– **Andrea Reynolds:** Currently, most texts I translate are offered or suggested to me, and as I easily fall in love with all sorts of texts, my only request is: good quality, which is mostly given anyway, although I have turned down work or would in certain situations suggest that the translation be done by a colleague who already has experience with a specific author. I translate prose, poetry and factual texts, sometimes as books. I like the flow of stories and novels, and the brooding over poetry, searching and waiting for the right word, and the research regarding factual texts which teaches me a lot and is incredibly interesting. Therefore – best is a mix of all types of texts.

• **Daniela Humajová:** *Which Slovak authors do you like; which of them have you translated; which were close to your heart and why?*

– **Andrea Reynolds:** I read Slovak authors across generations and periods. I love the pictures of the “old days” painted by Kukučín in *Mladé letá*, as well as the quiet writing deep as a mountain lake of Janko Silan, and I think it is great fun to re-read Božena Slančíková-Timrava. I have always been astounded by Rudolf Sloboda’s intensive, conscious and employment of

merging of author and person in his writing, and Ivan Laučík is one of my favourite timeless poets. Regarding post-1990 writing I think Balla has been consistently great and that little bit “different”, another, and very special talent, is in my opinion Viliam Klimáček, taking his theatre work into account as well. Monika Kompaníková is, in her quiet and fussless way, also becoming a very important voice I think.

Regarding translation, I mainly stick to authors of my generation, i.e. writers born in the 60s and after. I have translated various short texts (stories, extracts of books, poems) by different contemporary authors. A special relationship developed between me and Jana Beňová by translating *Parker* as a book, some of her other texts, and working on *Plán odprevádzania*. Regarding the poetry of recent years I have been deeply moved, touched and shaken by the poems of Andrej Hablák and Radoslav Tomáš, to name two. I find it incredible which dimensions of thought, picturing and imagination those two young poets explore, using a minimum of words in stunning form. And it seems to me that poets like Hablák and Tomáš are still a little underestimated in their own environment.

• **Daniela Humajová:** *Which Slovak authors could stand comparison with other European writers and titles and could arouse interest abroad?*

– **Andrea Reynolds:** A few general aspects are important in my opinion, mainly: an interesting story, a timeless or currently interesting theme and, of course, good writing. Informing and entertaining are further important aspects. To give examples: I think Pavol Rankovs *Stalo sa... [It happened...]* is a great picture of historic and political developments since 1938 involving the regions and aspects of Slovakia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria and Germany, all put in a very human story. We get these kinds of stories from different points of views, parties and countries, but we have not yet got it in current literature with such a spectrum from such a fairly unjudgemental Slovak point of view. This book brings a breath of fresh air to an important theme which is interesting for Germans, Austrians etc. too, and a great inspiration for a film script – I think. Monika Kompaníková’s books *Biele miesta* and *Piata loď*

are in other ways “compatible” and attractive – as intense human stories, deep psychological searches into individuals and families and the structures of society, written in a quiet, but breathtaking and even alarming way, although still with humour. I personally think that good novels rooted in the Slovak environment, but not strongly glued to it, can best compete on the European market. And it seems that there are more and more novels like this being written.

I also think that there is great potential for Slovak authors in other areas of writing such as essay, theatre and journalism to contribute to the European market in translation, though this has not been explored deeply enough yet.

• **Daniela Humajová:** *To what extent is Slovak literature known in Germany? What does the typical reader know about it?*

– **Andrea Reynolds:** It is difficult to measure the level of awareness regarding Slovak literature or Slovak authors in Germany. I would say that there are three groups who are readers or observers. One group consists of literature professionals, such as editors of literature magazines or representatives of cultural institutions as well as publishers or literary agents who are aware of Slovak literature or certain authors. There has been a certain constant level of requests for readings or publishing of Slovak literature. The second group consists of people with connections to Slovakia or Slovak language and literature, such as expatriots and students, academics working on the subject or people simply being interested in the region for whatever reason; they form a kind of “internal fan club” turning up at events out of enthusiasm, loyalty or duty. The third and largest group, consisting of average German readers, I presume, is hardly aware of Slovak literature. Michal Hvorecký may have been heard of, but otherwise I doubt that most people, even those literary educated, could name any Slovak author or tell you anything about Slovak literature as such. However, could the average educated reader tell you anything about Danish or Finnish or Dutch literature? In the best case, people would name Hans Christian Andersen and Peter Høeg as Danish authors, and there we are again, it is mainly the author who is known for his work, and not primarily for his nationality.

Sometimes I think it would be best to initially present translated scripts anonymously, without the author’s name and background to publishers and public, to avoid labelling.

• **Daniela Humajová:** *What is your “working method” when translating and what are, in your opinion, the biggest problems of a translation? Which of the translated authors created the toughest problem for you and why?*

– **Andrea Reynolds:** I translate in four steps: 1. rough translation, 2. working on details, 3. checking once more each sentence or line against the original, 4. final proof-reading. The biggest challenges technically are local words used by a very small group of Slovak speakers in a small region, sometimes only in a couple of villages, and other specific vocabulary such as

cross-language words, for example, Slovak–Hungarian, Slovak–German dialect words. Otherwise I spend a lot of time on research – quotes in the original language (which book of Herman Hesse, which page and paragraph?), descriptions of certain flowers, birds, buildings, historic events, technical equipment and nearly anything one can imagine may have to be identified. That is very time consuming, but it is also very interesting, and educating at the same time. If possible I contact the author to clarify and verify words, phrases and facts.

• **Daniela Humajová:** *What are, in your view, the biggest problems when translating text from Slovak into German?*

– **Andrea Reynolds:** A translator has to be very creative and inventive translating poetry, in which the form of the text and also the sound of certain letters are very important, taking rhymes, alliterations and many other details into account. German word order is different from Slovak (certain parts of verb constructions are always at the end in German...), for example and this can quite often give me a bit of a headache – to keep the structure, the break in the poem’s verses, and the very specific but also revealing meaning of often very short verses. Translating slang or dialect is a bit of a challenge too.

• **Daniela Humajová:** *Which world writers are your favourites?*

– **Andrea Reynolds:** Having been living in the UK over the last years I have discovered for myself British and Irish authors of different generations. I fell especially for Virginia Woolf’s writing, her talent to create from an unspectacular plot with minimum action, by precise and detailed description in slow movement, a fantastic complex picture of human beings, relations and situations and an impressive piece of literature. I enjoy Graham Greene and James Joyce very much too, and some works of contemporary authors like Andrea Levy and Kazuo Ishiguro.

• **Daniela Humajová:** *What German publisher have you cooperated with? Why it is so difficult for German publishers to reach the decision to publish a literary work by a Slovak writer?*

– **Andrea Reynolds:** I have been mainly in contact with small publishers, and magazines (Leipziger Literaturverlag, Die HOREN, Ostragehege etc.). I do not think German publishers are reluctant and hesitant towards Slovak authors and Slovak literature as such, but it is about publishing the best authors, the best pieces of literature, and to make proper money or at least to survive in business. The facts are: the book market as such is massive, with millions of books written each year. There are many, many German authors rejected by German publishers. And translations are always initially more costly than books written in the country’s or region’s language (except already established worldwide bestsellers); therefore the risk and success assessment for publishers has to be run on a different level regarding translations. According to this nature of the book world it is, for example, much more difficult to get a translation

into the English language book market than into the German language book market.

I personally think the best way to get into the German market (and into other markets) is simple: a good story or a good message, when it concerns poetry: compatible – understandable, that means not exclusively country- or region-coded, high quality language, with an interesting aspect, having a little touch of natural difference without trying too hard. Authors and their works should above all stand by themselves, and stand out by their quality. No doubt about national identity, but sometimes, I think, the marketing label “Slovak literature” is a little too sticky and keeps a fantastic wide range of very different authors a bit too much fenced in.

• **Daniela Humajová:** *How do you view the Slovak contemporary literary scene?*

– **Andrea Reynolds:** The contemporary literature scene has been and is, in my opinion, vital and productive. I lived in Slovakia for a few years until 2004. In the 90s it seemed to me that nearly everybody in Slovakia was writing like crazy: take competitions like POVIEDKA. I was stunned by the confidence of people to send in manuscripts and that writing and being creative was, and probably still is, such an important part of life, and

not at all an unachievable goal. Many excellent young authors have profited and established themselves this way. The tendency seems to be that there are increasingly more novels on the market now. It seems that quite a few authors have practised a lot with short stories and have now come to write novels: for example Pavol Rankov, Balla, Monika Kompaníková. Maybe this was encouraged by the ROMAN competition too, but it seems to me to be also a natural process. Not that there have not been novels before, but the level has risen and I suppose the way of writing has changed somewhat.

What I treasure enormously is the accessibility of Slovak authors and the literature scene as such. Personal contact is possible to most of the writers easily, they are very co-operative regarding translation, most Slovak writers are still far away from the elite behaviour of the literature business as practised in many other countries. Internal hierarchies certainly exist in the Slovak literature scene, but that hardly concerns me as a translator, and there is in Slovak literature life an enormous fresh breeze, and for me a very human touch.

Thank you and good luck with your next translations!

JANA BEŇOVÁ: SO SCHREIBE ICH EBEN

So schreibe ich eben könnte das Motto von Jana Beňová Schaffen lauten. Als ob sie von der Frage nach dem Warum und Wie Ihres Schreibens überrascht worden wäre und es auch sonst keine ausschweifenden Erklärungen gäbe, schon gar kein verteidigendes Ich kann nicht anders. Jana Beňová folgt ihrer Intuition und schreibt wie sie schreibt. So ist das eben. Punkt. Es ist zunächst die Einfachheit, die den Charme ihrer Bücher ausmacht: kurze schlichte Szenen, klare Bilder, Poesie,

Komik, doch kein Geschwafel, jedes Wort sitzt. Da sind zum Beispiel in PARKER eine Art kindliche Aufrichtigkeit und Direktheit (siehe das Heidi-Motiv sowie Kindheits Erinnerungen) zu finden, dazu eine auf Alltagsszenen als auch auf Fantasie basierende pointierte Komik, einige in minimalistischer Lyrik zusammengefasste Kapitel der Liebesbeziehung. Doch einfach ist das Konzept von Jana Beňová Büchern wiederum auch nicht. Alles ist miteinander verwoben – Vergangenheit, Gegenwart, Zukunft, Fantasie, Realität, bekannte Motive, erfundene Motive, immer wieder Symbolik und Metaphern. Schreitet man von einer kleinen Szene zur nächsten, so hat man am Ende einen sehr langen und erstaunlichen Weg durch viele existentielle Bereiche des menschlichen Daseins zurückgelegt, da geht es um die Liebe, natürlich, doch auch um Freundschaften, Familie und Herkunft, ums Jungsein, ums Altsein, ums Sterben und ums Überleben, ums Arbeiten, um viele verschiedene Orte, ums zu Hause sein, ums Reisen und um tausend andere Dinge. Jana Beňová Bücher durchpilgert man. Es ist ihrem außergewöhnlichen Geschick und Schreibtalent zu verdanken, dass man inspiriert hierhin und dahin schweift, doch dabei nicht vom Weg abkommt.

Jana Beňová Bücher sind eine besondere Herausforderung für Literaturwissenschaftler und Verleger. Sie passen nicht so richtig in die Schublade eines Genres: Prosa und Lyrik gehen ineinander über. Es gibt so viel Erzählerwechsel und Schreibweisenwechsel, dass man sie besser nicht zählen und analysieren, sondern einfach nur weiterlesen sollte. Die Bücher lassen sich auch nicht unter einem lukrativen Schlagwort vermarkten, denn z.B. PARKER ist eben kein Liebesroman im herkömmlichen Sinne und der Fokus der Bücher liegt auch nicht auf einem geradlinigen Handlungsstrang. Und doch weiß man als Leser intuitiv ziemlich schnell, dass man ein ausgezeichnetes Stück Literatur in der Hand hat: Es ist ein Ganzes. Es ist authentisch. Es geht unter die Haut. Es ist unterhaltsam.

Der slowakische Dichter Andrej Hrabal (*1927) erzählte mir einmal, dass er Jana Beňová PARKER lange wie die Bibel mit sich herumgetragen hat. Und so ist das wohl mit ihren Büchern: Man bekommt sie in die Hand, man hält sie fest, und dann halten einen schließlich diese Bücher fest. Und dann übersetzt man sie eben. Dieses Übersetzen ist ein Pilgerweg und Geleitweg der eigenen Art: Es ist zum Einen ausschweifend, da man sich zum Beispiel anhand der verwendeten Zitate durch ein beachtliches Spektrum an Sekundärliteratur durchliest (Johanna Spyris Heidi, Pinocchio, Gustav Meyrink, Charles Dickens, Grönländische Lebensweisen, dazu etliche slowakische Schriftsteller, um nur den Anfang zu nennen). Dann ist da die Komplexität, die Textzusammenhänge müssen bis zum letzten Buchstaben durch Verfremdungen hindurch erfasst werden, so zum Beispiel das Heidi-Motiv in einem völlig anderen, entfremdeten Kontext, damit der Sinn vollständig erhalten bleibt. Andererseits muss in der Übersetzung jedes Wort sitzen, selbst wenn die Grammatik im Wege steht. Da gibt es nicht viel Raum zum Manövrieren, denn Jana Beňová ist eben auch Poetin, Journalistin und Lektorin, da gibt es kein vages, kein zufälliges Wort.

Jana Beňová hat mir vor etlichen Jahren, als wir uns noch kaum kannten, PARKER in die Hand gedrückt. Und seitdem ist es recht unspektakulär so weitergegangen, das Schreiben und das Übersetzen – mit viel Freude auf beiden Seiten.

Andrea Reynolds

DAS, WAS DIE SEELE ERHEBT

Alfons Wicz

Ján Zambor

Zelený večer – Grüner Abend, Verlag Im Wald,
Rimbach, 2012

Übersetzt von Róža Domašcyna

Der slowakische Dichter Ján Zambor ist in der Lausitz kein Unbekannter. Auf dem Fest der sorbischen Poesie 2008 hat er zur Freude der Lyrikenthusiasten seine Gedichte in slowakischer und sorbischer Sprache gelesen. Jetzt liegt von Dichter, der auch Literaturwissenschaftler und Hochschullehrer ist, ein zweisprachiger Lyrikband vor, der im bayerischen Verlag Im Wald erschien. Er heißt „Zelený večer – Grüner Abend. Die Gedichte ins Deutsche nachgedichtet hat Róža Domašcyna.

Ján Zambors Gedichte wurzeln in seiner slowakischen Kindheitsgegend, einem Land mit Gebirge, reichlichem und unberührtem Wald, dahinplätschernden Gebirgsquellen und grünenden Wiesen. Seine tiefe Verbundenheit mit der Natur und den Dorfbewohnern jener Region kommt schon im ersten Gedicht „Večer/Abend“ zum tragen. Eine kleine Episode am Küchentisch zeugt von der Liebe und Achtung den Eltern gegenüber, die lebenslang schwere Landarbeit leisten mußten. Dergleichen verfährt der Dichter unter dem Titel „Matka/Die Mutter“. Seine raffiniert einfache Episodenbeschreibung ist von tiefer Wertschätzung getragen. Emotionales und Erfrischendes weiß Ján Zambor von der landschaftlichen Schönheit seiner Heimat zu sagen, wie zum Beispiel im Gedicht „Rieka/Der Fluss“ - das auch Menschheitshistorie tangiert - und „Tu/Hier“. Unter dem Titel „Na ostrove/Auf der Insel“ schreibt er über die Verunreinigung und also Vernichtung der Natur, die auch vor der slowakischen Landschaft nicht halt macht.

Die meisten der Gedichte, die 117 Seiten umfassen, haben mit der Liebe zu tun. Dem Dichter geht es zu allererst um die Liebe zwischen den Menschen. Ich vermeine gerade in diesen Gedichten viel von der Seele und dem Empfinden seiner Landsleute herauszulesen, ist mir doch dies Land nicht unbekannt. Ein gutes Beispiel dafür ist „Návrat/Rückkehr“. Der immerwährende Anspruch der Liebe, verbunden mit Kindheits-erinnerungen, fesselt den Lyrikliebhaber in mir, vor allem, weil die Verwurzelung in seiner Kindheitsgegend tief und unverstellt ist. Dabei sind die Gedichte des Ján Zambor nicht etwa nur für den Leser in der Slowakei gedacht oder typisch, sie haben allen Weltbewohnern viel zu sagen. Eben und gerade weil sie in einer Region entspringen und diese mitmeinen. Das überzeugt mich an den Versen des Dichters am meisten. In seinen Gedichten ist das Typische, Unverwechselbare, das dem Menschen eigen ist und zugleich ein Empfinden der Natur, dessen Teil der Mensch bildet. In ihnen ist aber

auch das Schöne und Bizarre der slowakischen Landschaft.

Den Einsatz des kleinen slawischen Volkes, seine Bereitschaft und den Willen, die eigenen Besonderheiten zu erhalten und sich dafür stark zu machen, bringt der Poet im Gedicht „Lipa – rozkrídľujúca, so žobráckym krídlom/Die Linde – mit dem ausgebreiteten Bettlerflügel“ zum Ausdruck. Obwohl die Verse einen patriotischen Anklang haben - erinnern sie doch an den slowakischen Dichter der Romantik, Samo Bohdan Hroboň – spürt man in ihnen weder Pathos noch einen mahnenden Zeigefinger.

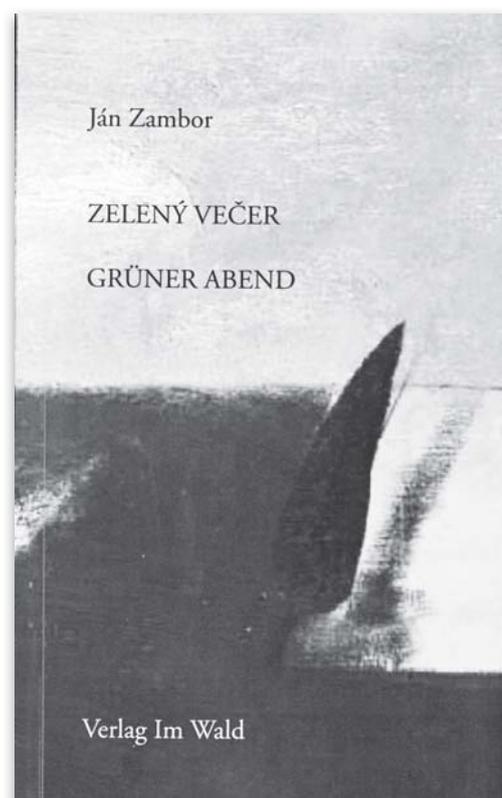
Sehr beeindruckt haben mich auch die letzten Gedichte dieses Bandes, die Verse vom Bekennen zur glücklich-einfachen Kindheit und vom Sehnen des Dichters, immer wieder in diese Kindheitsheimat zurückzufinden.

Róža Domašcyna hat sich bei der Übertragung und Nachdichtung nicht nur in die Texte, sondern auch in die Inspirationsquellen von Seele und Herz des Dichters vertieft. So verlieren die deutschsprachigen Nachdichtungen gegenüber den daneben stehenden Originalen nicht deren slowakisches Kolorit.

Die Nachdichterin hat mit besonders treffenden Begriffen den tiefen Sinn der dichterischen Worte zu fassen und ins Deutsche über zu setzen vermocht.

Beim Lesen der Nachdichtungen vergaß ich zeitweise gänzlich, dass ich Übertragungen vor mir habe und nicht das Original dieses Poeten aus der Slowakei.

Gut wäre es, könnte der Domowina-Verlag in Bautzen sich entschließen, diese Gedichte dreisprachig, also slowakisch, deutsch und sorbisch zu publizieren, und wenn es nur in Form eines einfach gemachten Büchleins wäre.



SCHLAFLIED WILDER TIERE

Katharina Narbutovic

Mila Haugová

Schlaflied wilder Tiere

Edition Korrespondenzen, Reto Ziegler, Wien 2011

Übersetzt von Anja Utler und der Autorin

Mila Haugová's Gedichtband „Schlaflied wilder Tiere“ ist ein Buch des Abschieds und der Bilanzen, Zeugnis einer zweifachen Trennung: Die Mutter ist gestorben, der Geliebte fremd geworden, das lyrische Ich verletzt wie ein angefahrenes Tier. „Schlaflied wilder Tiere“ ist ein Buch der Erinnerung an die Zeit der Kindheit, an die Jahre mit dem Geliebten, es ist ein Buch der Eingewöhnung in die Abwesenheit, ein Buch der Einsamkeit und Leere, in dem die Menschen „verletzten nackten Sternen“ gleichen oder im Nebel umherirrenden wilden Tieren. Und es ist ein Buch, das sich mit Bedacht den gebliebenen Fragmenten – der Sprache – stellt. Wie eine Sprache finden für den Verlust jenseits alles bereits Geschriebenen, wie der Sprachlosigkeit entkommen, der „Einbahnfalle des verschlossenen Gartens der Sprache“?

Die Räume, die ein Mensch in seinen Träumen bewohnt, heißt es, seien ein Spiegelbild seiner Seele. Die Räume, die Mila Haugová's lyrisches Ich bewohnt, sind ein leeres Zimmer mit wenigen weißen Möbeln und einer hölzernen Flügeltür, in mattes, milchiges Licht getaucht, sowie ein von einer schützenden Mauer umfriedeter Garten. Es sind geschützte Orte, an denen das lyrische Ich der großen slowakischen Dichterin Mila Haugová sich vornehmlich aufhält, während draußen „grenzenloser Winter“ regiert, eine „zerrüttete Welt“ aus Eis und Schnee und Entsagung.

Mila Haugová's lyrischem Ich gelingt dies, indem es sich durchlässig macht, den Blick nach innen richtet, und die Welt hinter den geschlossenen Lidern bis in die unmerklichste Bewegung hinein auslotet – und dabei doch so glasklar sieht, was um es herum ist und geschieht, als hätte es die Augen weit geöffnet. Es ist das für Mila Haugová's Dichtung so typische Universum des Dazwischen, das aus leeren Zimmern, ummauerten Gärten, eingerollten Pflanzenwurzeln, Denkschleifen, Flügelschatten, Wortkörpern, Seelenfalten und Traumtapisserien besteht – die Warte der Seherin, von der aus die 1942 in Budapest geborene, in Bratislava und Levice lebende Tochter einer Ungarin und eines Slowaken schreibt. In „Schlaflied wilder Tiere“ ist der Ort des Dazwischen, den das lyrische Ich sich wählt, die „Schwelle in einer offenen Tür“, zentraler Punkt auf der Weltenachse, von dem aus es seine Reisen „durch die Geschosse“ von Zeit und Raum unternimmt, zurück in die Kindheit, die damaligen Fluchten ins Daheim des Waldes, der Himbeeren, der sich aus der Haut klaubenden kleinen

Schlangen und jungen Marder; zurück nach Klagenfurt im November 1999, als der Liebste „die Hand ans Zugfenster gelegt hat“, die Frau „acht Stunden lang“ mit seiner „Spur gefahren“ ist und alles anfang; zurück zu den Tagen des Glücks, zum Waldpfad, den wilden Zyklopen, Brombeeren und drunten die beiden „langsam gewordenen Körper“ der Liebenden „im trüben Wasser des Sees“; zurück zu den Illusionen, dem Schweigen, den Worten, mit denen sie einander fast getötet haben; zurück zum Haus der Mutter „mit leerer Mitte“, in dem nur das Klavier geblieben ist und das lyrische Ich sich abends allein zudecken muß, mit jener Decke, die sonst immer die Mutter über ihm ausgebreitet hat. Es ist mehr ein Ergründen des Gewesenen denn ein klarer Blick nach vorn, ist die Zukunft doch durch die Trennung vom Geliebten verstellt und gilt es den Zustand der gegenwärtigen Einsamkeit zu ertragen, darauf zu warten, daß allmählich der Raum für das Neue sich offenbart: „die Order ist / warten ausharren auf der Kante: der scharfen Kante des scheinbar / ergebenen Nebels ich kann nicht sehen aber es vollzieht sich: / der Schatten Fortschreiten fällt auf den nahen / Hügel: eine kalte Stimme // Wohin gehst du? //

Inmitten der Stille, die mit der bewußten Einübung in die Abwesenheit einhergeht, kann sich schließlich kaum merklich, in der Sprache, das Neue manifestieren: „Nie bekomme ich was ich genommen habe aus dem geheimen / Wortatlas: Bahnen Wege einen neuen Himmel (unterm Drohen / der alten Erde) unter des Meeres fortdauernder Abwesenheit ... / Die Bewegungen des Wegs als geschlängelt System: / gerate ich weiter weg von dem / dem ich mich nähere? / Warum rede ich wenn ich vom Weg nur Schieferspuren habe: / die Abdrücke zerbrechen leicht. Die Finger, / die durch eine Mauer greifen wollten. // Die Mauer hat keine Tür. // Alles ist schon geschrieben du nimmst nur: bewegst dich / über das in-transparente Papier / dort haben sie alles an dich abgegeben: gesagt nichts. / So lebst du im Herzen des Lichts. Willst abgeben von dir: / manchmal sieht das wie Glück aus.“



Peter Karpinský (Compiler)
Päť x päť. Antológia súčasnej slovenskej prózy
Five x Five. Anthology of Current Slovak Prose

Literárne informačné centrum, Bratislava 2011



The Slovak Centre for Information on Literature has published an interesting volume mapping the current literary prose scene in Slovakia. The editor (and one of the selected authors) Peter Karpinský has picked a representative number of 25 writers to illustrate the current state of Slovak prose for a wider readership. Even though he has tried to make a diversified and rich selection, his anthology is inevitably subjective. Karpinský has used several general rules for choosing his authors and their excerpts. Firstly, he has included only those who started to publish after 1989, because the older generations of authors are well established, need no presentation in a special volume. Secondly, the pieces of work published in the anthology need to have been written after 2000 (this rule had to be broken in the case of the deceased Václav Pankovčín).

Among the authors presented we may find relatively well-established writers who are already considered to be an indivisible part of the Slovak literary scene. With them, the compiler provides us with a group of authors from the younger generation, or those who have made their debuts in the last 5–7 years, and who are making their way in the Slovak writers' community (Balla, Jana Beňová, Jana Bodnárová, Ivana Dobrákovová, Karol D. Horváth, Tomáš Horváth, Michal Hvorecký, Jana Juráňová, Daniela Kapitáňová, Peter Karpinský, Laco Kerata, Koloman Kocúr, Monika Kompaníková, Mária Kopcsay, Uršula Kovalyk, Peter Krištúfek, Silvester Lavrík, Ján Litvák, Pavol Rankov, Pavel Sibyla, Viťo Staviarsky, Veronika Šikulová, Marek Vadas, and Svetlana Žuchová).

The anthology *Five x Five* is a medium of first contact for interested readers. Each section is accompanied by biographical information about the author and short characteristics of his or her literary work.

Alta Vášová
Sfarbenia
Colouration

F. R. & G., Ivanka pri Dunaji 2011.

The renowned Slovak prose writer, scriptwriter and publicist Alta Vášová has again produced another highly interesting book. The collection of prose texts, *Colouration*, is composed of 20 "coloured" situations. The visual perception in them synesthetically points to natural touch (of sand, snow, mud, grass, schist, metal), to scent, the smell of plants and fruits (grass, aubergine, flowers, lemon), natural and hand-made products (honey, soap, coal), parts of the human body (skin) or to the crystal-clear visibility of natural elements (air). It deals with situations of the hidden presence between the visible and invisible, staccato scripts of their latency, concealment, indecision, suspense. Alta Vášová creates, with atmosphere and attunement provided through sensual coloured filters, changing, purifying and polluting the original reception, a series of indirect denominations of states of mind. The texts of Alta Vášová should be read also as an homage to the artistic perception of the world, where to see means to know. They show the honour given by the author to her fellow colleagues – visual artists – but also as a proper regression to visual perception of the world. The prose pieces in the volume are written in a special way, so that it seems that the boundary between prose and poetry is eliminated. This quality is strengthened even more by the absence, in most of them, of real action or story.

Ivan Štrpka

Bebé: jedna kríza
Bebé: One Crisis

F. R. & G., Ivanka pri Dunaji 2011

The latest collection of poems by the leading Slovak poet Ivan Štrpka is, in fact, not really completely new. *Bebé: jedna kríza* is an extended, rewritten and conceptually redefined version of the same book, previously published in 2001. Nevertheless, it is a perfect example of the change which the first text undergoes to become the new one.

The work is divided into five sections. In the presented collection of poems we can find a repetition of psalm-style elements such as: the suffering lamb, which can be mute, fictional or hypothetical; an ivory tower that has no entrance from the outside; a sleeping *Bebé*, curled snakelike; the tree of fruit – non-fruit, which is continuously devoured by someone handless, mouthless, legless, and headless; silence, enabling a slow fusion with the absent mind of *Bebé*; or the tongue shining in the mouth emerging from the red heartbeat of the lamb.

The author sets his story outside history, outside time: *There is no history. There are only events and stories.* Štrpka's message is universal and absolutely dialectic – a message about the continuously-pulsing reality in us, and of us in it. His poems break the traditional understanding of poetry and provide the reader with a rich semantic value.

Peter Repka

Spätné zrkadlo Rear-view Mirror

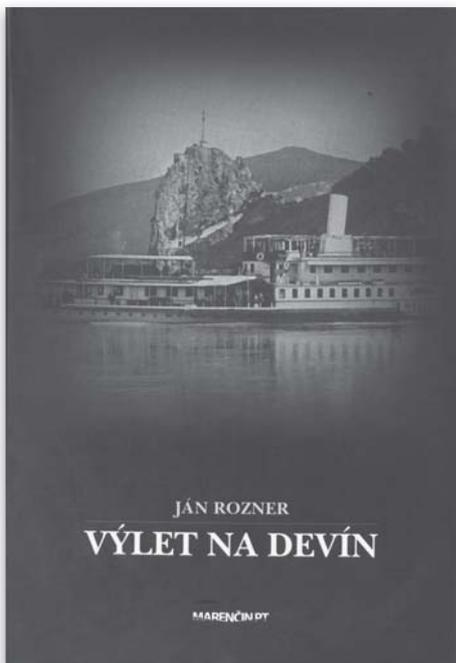
KK Bagala and literarnyklub, Levice 2012

This book brings memory-style autobiographical short stories from Peter Repka, the leading poet and member of the *Osamelí bežci* (*Lonely Runners*) movement. The author, who has lived and worked from 1970 in Germany, has gathered in this volume some of the most real memories and human insights reflecting his almost 70 year-long life. In a specific manner he describes the experiences and incidents which he went through with his friends and fellow authors such as Ivan Štrpka and Ivan Laučík, memorable events from his travels to European cities like Sofia and Frankfurt. He also mentions his fascination with Marcello Mastroianni. The whole ensemble of 36 short stories gathered in *Spätné zrkadlo* provides the reader with the intelligent and interesting memories of a truly experienced poet, often spiced with pertinent quotations from his diaries.

Ján Rozner

Výlet na Devín The Journey to Devín

Marenčin PT, Bratislava 2011



Devín forms one of the most illustrious symbols of Slovak history. The castle, its neighbouring village and the junction of the Dunaj and Morava rivers have been the scenes of numerous important historical milestones. Throughout history Devín (Theben in German, Dévény in Hungarian) was tightly connected with the adjacent town of Bratislava and the nearby various ethnicities. It was valued by the Hungarians, who erected on the castle hill a monumental statue of their first prince Arpád. The Slovak national movement, led by Ľudovít Štúr in the 19th century, chose it for their symbolic journeys

and the strengthening of national identity. During the Second World War it became part of the Reich and gave voice to the German element in the village. During the Czechoslovak and Slovak era it served, and still serves, as a venue for cultural, political and ideological manifestations and ceremonies.

The book *The Journey to Devín* gives an account based on the writings of Ján Rozner (1922–2006), a literary, theatre and film critic, publicist and writer, whose prose opus is now being published only posthumously. Compiled by his family from his scattered manuscripts, the book reconstructs Rozner's experiences from his journeys to Devín. The work might be described as an autobiography, and is written with many suggestive opinions and associations. Rozner gives us a deep insight of an intellectual and contemporary witness of the times which, in various ways, seriously affected people's destinies. He describes the demonstrations of his Nazism-inclined co-citizens, all dressed in white knee socks and leather shorts, taking place on the very spot where a few decades later the communist propaganda festivities were performed. *The Journey to Devín*, with the other books *Seven Days to the Funeral* and *The Night after Front*, is the last part of Rozner's posthumously published autobiographical trilogy.

Július Satinský

Expedície 1973 – 1982 Expeditions 1973–1982

Slovart and Edition Ryba, Bratislava 2011

Almost ten years after the early departure of one of the best humorists and comedic authors Július Satinský († 2002) his readers have a chance to explore another book connected to his most intimate affairs. Thanks to the gratifying efforts of his daughter Lucia, forming a unique travel diary from the years 1973–1982, called *Expeditions* provides an insight to lesser-known parts of Satinský's personality. The book is a collection of excerpts from his travel diaries and is composed of six different sections. Each of them is devoted to a special expedition, each being one of his numerous summer touristic journeys throughout Slovakia and abroad. The first four expeditions took place in the 1970s in different parts of Slovakia. Members of the expedition, besides the narrator and author Satinský, were fellow friends like Tomáš Janovic, Vlado Bednár, Karol Mičieta, and Peter Oravec. The other two expeditions took place in the 1980s and their participants were Satinský's relatives (brother, brother-in-law and nephew). The first was accomplished in south Bohemia, the other in the Swiss Alps. Satinský presents himself in the book as a sensitive observer and explorer of (not only) natural wonders. The travel diaries of Július Satinský are full of amusing anecdotes and fitting remarks on society. The book is accompanied by the author's original illustrations made by author, contemporary postcards and pictures. It is particularly this visual elaboration, with its strong emphasis on graphic design, which makes *Expeditions*, also, an artistic production uncommon among books published in Slovakia.

SLOVAK AUTHORS AT THE BOLOGNA CHILDREN'S BOOK FAIR 2012

It is a long tradition that Slovak publishers of children's books exhibit their best new titles on the collective Slovak stand at the Bologna Children's Book Fair. It is also a long tradition that Slovak writers and illustrators present themselves at various events organised by LIC and its Italian partners outside the book fair. This year writers Jana Juráňová and Juraj Šebesta attended the fair.

A performed reading, by actors of the Reon Theatre, from Šebesta's new novel for teenagers, *Venussha*, was held in Sala Borsa on 20 March, and on 22 March, a performed reading of *La Principessa di Venezia* by Jana Juráňová took place at the same venue. In the centre of Bologna on 20 March there was opening of a special event co-organised by BIBIANA: an exhibition of illustrations by Japanese and Slovak artists, held in support of the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe victims.



Viera Anoškinová and Juraj Šebesta at the fair

THREE SLOVAK POETESSES IN FRA CAFÉ, PRAGUE

Slovak poetesses, Nóra Ružičková and Elena Hidvéghyová-Yung (on 13 March 2012) and Mila Haugová (on 19 April) presented their poetry at the events organised by the Czech poet Petr Borkovec. In the cosy bookshop/café and in an atmosphere of vivid interest, discussions on Slovak poetry followed.



Photo: © Ondřej Lipár

ZUSKA KEPPOVÁ IN BUDAPEST

Zuska Kepplová was one of the guests of the First Novel Festival at the International Budapest Book Festival from 19 to 22 April. Her first novel, *Buchty švabachom* (Dumplings in the Gothic Tattoo), has been listed among the ten finalists of the ANASOFT LITERA Prize 2012. Zuska Kepplová has also taken part in an international panel discussion on Otherness.



JANA JURÁŇOVÁ AND PETER KRÍŠTÚFEK IN BERLIN

The Berlin Humboldt University was the venue of a presentation of Slovak authors, Jana Juráňová and Peter Kríšťúfek, on the 30 May 2012. Both writers have presented samples of their literary works in the presence of students of the Slovak literature in Berlin and numerous guest including the Slovak ambassador in Germany, His Excellency Igor Slobodník, the director of the Slovak Institute in Berlin Martin Sarvaš, professor Alfrun Kliems from Slavonic Studies of Humboldt University and others.



From left: Daniela Humajová, Monika Banášová, Jana Juráňová, Monika Turočková, Alfrun Kliems, Ronald Hammel, Peter Kríšťúfek, Eva Gondorová

THE SLOVAK COLLECTIVE STAND AT THE BOOK WORLD, PRAGUE

On Friday, 18 May, the Czech President, Václav Klaus, visited shortly the stand and talked to LIC director, Miroslava Vallová, and publisher Daniel Kollár, the President of the Association of Slovak Publishers and Booksellers. On Saturday, 19 May, the publication *Genius loci (roz)hovory o Slovensku* (Genius Loci /Inter/Views on Slovakia) was presented by its publisher, Daniel Kollár, editor, Mikuláš Huba, and one of the interviewed, Marián Geišberg, who, together with his son, Martin, played and sang a few of his own songs.



From left: Daniel Kollár and Václav Klaus

Erik Jakub Groch and Rudolf Jurolek have presented selections of their works to the visitors of the City Library in Stuttgart. The presentation took place on the 19 June 2012 in the framework of the Slovak Evening.

The portraits of Slovak authors were written, compiled and translated by Zuska Kepplová, Inka Martinová, Mária Smoláriková, Milan Richter, Veronika Széherová, Dušan Zupka. Supervision of English texts: Adrian Brown. Supervision of German texts: Simon and Eva Gruber.

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