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WORDS OF THE SLAVS

LIC, the Embassy of the Slovak republic in Rome and Italian Chamber of Deputies organized a unique symposium at the occasion of 1150. anniversary of the SS. Cyril and Methodius mission in Great Moravia. The seminar called *Le parole degli Slavi – Slová Slovanov* took place at the premises of the Italian parliament on the 31st of January 2013 under the auspices of the President of Italian Parliament Gianfranco Fini. Speeches were delivered by Mária Krásnohorská (Ambassador of Slovak republic in Italy), Miroslava Vallová (Director of LIC), as well as by scholars and academics (Marta Kerulová, Andrej Škoviera, Francesco Leoncini, Antonello Biagini). In the evening an artistic presentation of the Proglas (Foreword) newest edition was presented by Dana Podracká, Ján Zambor and Daniel Pastirčák.



BALLA IN THE FRA CAFÉ

Vladimir Balla, the laureate of Anasoft litera Prize 2012, opened regular presentations of Slovak poets and prose writers in Fra café, Prague, on 26 February. He read extract from his awarded prose work, *In the name of the Father*, and discussed with the public long into the night.



EUROPEAN SPRING 2013

The international literary symposium European Spring 2013 took place at the Krens Literaturhaus on the 12th and 13th of March. The main themes were *Invisible streams and flexible identities: literature from the view of movement*. In the main discussion Slovakia was represented by prose writer Monika Kompaníková.



SLOVAK WRITERS IN INDIA

In March 2013 delegation of four Slovak writers, Eva Luka, Ján Litvák, Peter Šulej and Martin Solotruk, visited India as the guests of the Sahitya Academy. During their stay they visited New Delhi and Mumbai and presented their works in English and Hindi translations at both the places. H.E Marian Tomašík, Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to India, attended the event in New Delhi and invited writers to dinner. Reciprocal visit of Indian writers to Slovakia is expected this year.

FOTO pride

SARAJEVO WINTER

For the first time a Slovak writer took part in the international festival Sarajevo Winter which has been organised by a well known Bosnian poet and publisher Ibrahim Spahić already for 19 years. At a reading on 22 February Monika Kompaníková presented her award winning novel, *The Fifth Boat*, and her translator, Zdenka Valent Belić, read an extract in Serbian. The Embassy of Slovak Republic to Bosnia took part in preparations of the event.

BOOK FAIRS IN PARIS AND LONDON

The Centre for Information on Literature again organised the national Slovak collective stands at the Paris Book Fair in March and at the London Book Fair in April 2013. The collective stand exhibited books from more than twenty Slovak publishers and gave opportunity for negotiations between Slovak and foreign publishers. The Paris Book Fair was accompanied by a presentation of books by Veronika Šikulová.



XX. EDITION OF BUDAPEST BOOK FAIR

The 20th edition of the Budapest Book fair welcomed Slovak writer Rút Lichnerová on the 21st of April. She presented her book *Anna Regina*, which was published in Hungary with the translation by Klára Kortvélyessy in the Európa publishing house.



JANA JURÁŇOVÁ IN LEIPZIG

This year, Slovakia did not have its own stand at the Leipzig Book fair. Although, the visitors could see a presentation of one of most important Slovak writers Jana Juráňová. She had a reading and presentation of her books on the 16th of March first at the forum in Café Europa and later at the Leipzig Town hall.

BEŇOVÁ BERLIN

Jana Beňová and Stanislava Repar have taken part in an international discussion on Slovak-Slovenian Contexts of the literature, at the Humboldt University in Berlin, on the 30 April 2013.



Dana Hučková

FINDING ONE'S OWN PATH

(Current Forms of Slovak Prose)

Current Slovak prose is polyphonic thanks to a number of authors with strong personalities and their own distinctive literary style. In spite of their solitariness and individuality, in their literary works they have several themes in common, which then appear to be central and typical, such as, for example, memory, ideology, personal situation and home and the world.

Memory

The theme of memory, autobiography and authenticity is nothing new in the Slovak literary context; we only have to mention the writing of Rudolf Sloboda, Vincent Šikula or Ivan Kadlečík. However, eight years ago, in 2005, it seemed to resonate polyphonically, in several works at the same time, and it has been reappearing ever since. As chance would have it, it appeared simultaneously in as many as three books: in two prose works from **Pavol Vilikovský's** collection *Čarovný papagáj a iné gýče*/The Magic Parrot and Other Kitsch, in the prose work in letter form by **Jaroslava Blažková's** *Happyendy*/Happy Endings and in **Etela Farkašová's** book *Stalo sa*/It Happened. All these focused on the author's own personal experience of loss (the dying and death of their near ones), seen as a basic existential situation, a great external turn of events. The aspect of writing they have in common is the organisation of their memories: writing is to formulate what has been preserved and what is to remain preserved. In all three cases the stories have several layers; in them both the time and spatial levels shift; instead of a coherent presentation we have decomposition, instead of continuity there are sequences, images, episodes and fleeting moments. These memoir-like prose works make especially problematic the category of time, while the continual alternation of past and present has its counterpart in the alternation of various concepts of writing: personal notes alternate with other people's texts, other people's reading, with an evocation of their world.

This breaking up of linearity is another important feature of contemporary Slovak prose writing. The importance of the fragment and the aspect of memory are also central to the highly personal books *Ostrovy*

nepamäti/Islands of Oblivion by **Alta Vášová** (2008) and *Takmer neviditeľná*/Almost Invisible by **Jana Bodnárová** (2008). In both of them notes, fragments, memories and writing are important means of avoiding oblivion, they serve the desire to construct one's album of memories, to bring a person closer over the abyss of time in the manner of literary autobiography.

A similar view of writing was held by an author of quite a different generation, **Ján Rozner** (1922 – 2006), who only entered the Slovak literary context when his three prose works were published posthumously between 2009 and 2011. In his novel *Sedem dní do pohrebu*/Seven Days to the Funeral (2009) Rozner's impulse for reflection was the death of his wife Zora Jesenská, a well-known Slovak translator from Russian, while it was a question of remembering their marital relationship in the context of preparation for the funeral service of a person out of favour with those then in power. In his books of memoirs *Noc po fronte*/The Night after the Front (2010) and *Výlet na Devín*/Excursion to Devín (2011) Rozner looked at things from a different angle and changed his manner of narration, concentrating more on himself, his own individual past, his personal experience of great historical events. In both these prose works he keeps returning to his childhood, youth and early adulthood, as well as adulthood at the time of writing, while putting his account in the context of important historical events. In this way he depicts the meeting of the private world with the world of power, ideology, manipulation and deformation; he gives a witness account of himself and of the times.

The autobiographical aspect cannot be overlooked in the works of authors of the younger middle generation. Their growing experience of life and literature, already reflected upon from the artistic point of view, is shifting their literary expression towards more clearly layered and intellectually structured narratives. The importance of the autobiographical element can be seen in returns to childhood, reminiscences of youth and reflection on the current realities of life. This is a vital feature of **Veronika Šikulová's** work (*Domček jedným ťahom*/Little House in One Stroke, 2009; *Miesta v sieti*/Places in the Net, 2011, *Diera do svetra*/Hole in a Sweater, 2012)

The same element is found in the work of **Jana Beňová**, with emphasis on the authentic intimacy of

relationships and personal experience set in real time. In her books *Plán odprevádzania/Seeing People Off* (2008) and *Preč! Preč!/Away! Away!* (2012), that border on two genres (the latter is referred to as a novel/poem in two parts) she captures the world through fragments, which together make up a concise literary world portraying her own personal search, above all concerning the relationship between a man and woman.

People Suffering under the Pressures of the Times

Another important theme is the return to ideology, mainly calling into question previous interpretations. As mentioned above, this is one aspect of **Ján Rozner's** writing.

A recurring approach is the narration of the same story from the point of view of several different characters, or dealing repeatedly with one theme in the flow of time. Also topical is narration literally looking up from below, as several authors have used the child's view when portraying life in troubled and ever-changing times. This method exaggerates what is anyway a distorted picture of a period marked by ideological deformations. The child's interpretation is influenced by naivety, inexperience and innocence and this approach is exploited, for example, by Irena Brežná in her book *Na slepačích krídlach/On Chicken Wings* (2007), but also Ľubo Dobrovoda in *Ľa, malkáč/Me, a Little'un* (2005) and *Ľa, veľkáč/Me, a Big'un* (2008), or Milan Zelinka in the book *Teta Anula/Aunt Anula* (2007).

Pavel Vilikovský combined the theme of the past with an analysis of evil (*Vlastný životopis zla/Autobiography of Evil*, 2009). **Jana Juráňová** repeatedly returns to the theme of ideology in her own prose works, but also in her book of conversations with Agneša Kalinová *Mojich 7 životov/My 7 Lives* (2012). In *Orodovnice/Mediatrices* (2006) she concentrated on the stories of several women from one family and through them she also gives the story of the period (Slovakia from the times of the clerofascist wartime state), while as her point of departure for this psychological and social probe she took arguments about conventions and stereotypes in the perception of relations between men and women, children and parents, the institutions of marriage and the church.

Ideology and memory are also emphasised by **Dušan Šimko**, who in his novel *Gubbio* (2009) offered a six-fold probe into the past, with a single aim – to grasp the theme of informing in the flow of time; to understand the various forms of one human attitude in different social formations. In addition to this he is interested in the phenomenon of emigration, the status of the emigrant, the human experience of a politically or economically forced stay in a foreign country.

Interest in capturing the drama of Slovak history in the 20th century through the relationship between the individual and a period marked by ideology is also

evident in **Pavol Rankov's** two sociohistorical novels, *Stalo sa prvého septembra/It Happened on the First of September* (2008), covering the period 1938–1968, which is an attempt to capture in an epic narrative the peripeteias of 20th century history through the story of three friends and the woman they all love, and *Matky/Mothers* (2011), the story of a Slovak woman imprisoned in a Russian Gulag, that reaches out to the present time.

The Individual

The urgency of existential questions is also given concentrated attention by **Balla** (1967), who in his first book *Leptokaria* (1996) deals with a single theme – a person's Heidegger-like existential anxiety and fear of being in a world full of absurdities and external hostility. Associated motifs are the in/ability to communicate and solitude understood as the only space for authenticity. All Balla's subsequent prose works fall into this thematic framework: (*Outsideria/Outsiders*, 1997; *Gravidita/Pregnancy*, 2000; *Tichý kút/Quiet Corner*, 2001; *Unglik*, 2003; *De la Cruz*, 2005; *Cudzí/Strangers*, 2008; *V mene otca/In the Name of the Father*, 2011; *Oko/The Eye*, 2012). For Balla's literary protagonist life is absurd, it is a place of psychological traumas, physical suffering and dread, full of unfulfilled hopes and disappointments, full of loneliness.

The empathic and emotional approach of **Jana Bodnárová** (1950) can be seen as a counterweight to Balla's anxious depiction of existential tension. She concentrates on the richness of a person's emotional and, as it were, nervous life. She believes it important to capture what is ephemeral; she is interested in everything emotional within a human being as well as outside; she stresses the importance of poetic imagination, the reflection of shades of meaning, in a tone of sharpened, agitated perceptiveness and airy dreaminess (*Insomnia*, 2005).

The breakdown of the family, its influence on the development of the child's personality, with emphasis on disturbed relationships and asocial behaviour, hostility and the hopelessness of life, dominates in the existentially critical prose works of **Monika Kompaníková**. Her two collections of short stories *Miesto pre samotu/A Place for Loneliness* (2003), *Biele miesta/Blank Spaces* (2006) and the novel *Piata loď/The Fifth Ship* (2010) are proof of her story-telling mastery, her feeling for detail and visual imagery.

Home and the World

Another recurrent feature of contemporary Slovak literature is the literary thematising of the opposites home and abroad. In the new socio-political situation that arose after 1989 and with the appearance of a new generation of authors, especially after 2000, this traditional contrast, from the end of the 19th century perceived as a problem of national versus cosmopolitan, ours versus foreign/alien, took on a completely new

dimension and a completely new interpretation in Slovak culture. As, on account of the restrictions of the previous regime, older authors were not allowed to travel and get to know other countries, experience of other places only appears to any extent in their works after 1989 (J. Johanides: *Dívaj sa do modrých očí Londýna/Look in the Blue Eyes of London*, D. Dušek: *Zima na ruky/Cold Hands*, 2006; P. Vilikovský: *Pes na ceste/Dog on the Road*, 2010). However, this trend is much more noticeable in the work of young authors whose first works appeared at the end of the nineties (for example, **Peter Bilý** or **Michal Hvorecký**), and at the beginning of the new century (**Svetlana Žuchová**, **Ivana Dobrakovová**, **Zuska Kepplová**, to mention just a few).

In the work of the young generation of authors foreign countries – as the temporary home of their literary protagonists – offer a view from outside and an opportunity to make comparisons first and foremost with their own personal identity. Comparing national identities seems to remain outside their generation's focus of attention; the world is growing smaller, is being globalised and they regard it as being theirs as a whole. Home and world come together, join and overlap, but it always depends on the individual what place they give to space in their perception of reality. The Central European perspective was used, for example, by **Michal Hvorecký**, who in his novel *Dunaj v Amerike/The Danube in America* (2010), set against the background of a pleasure trip on the Danube for American tourists, acknowledges his debt to the novel/essay by Claudio Magris *Dunaj*, while portraying the regional stereotypes and ideological clichés of the Central European world. Young people travelling, with no deep ties to their own country, also appear in the short stories that make up his next book *Naum* (2012), subtitled “a novel in eleven stories.”

Giving stories a foreign setting is more markedly noticeable only after 2000 and is significantly connected with the great wave of young people leaving to go abroad, whether for study, work or to find their spiritual path (Peter Bilý: *Démon svätosti/Demon of Holiness*, 2004; *Don Giovanni*, 2007; Rober Bielik: *Gompa – Kláštorňý denník/A Monastery Diary*, 2011).

The foreign setting dominates in the work of **Svetlana Žuchová**, for example, who was studying medicine in Vienna when she published her first writings and who is now working in Prague. In the stories of her collection *Dulce de leche* (2003) she has no problem with the identity of her characters: her protagonists are from various corners of the world and they also move all over the world and their problems, no matter how individual and specific they appear to be, are for the most part sufficiently universal to address the reader. She also used the same viewpoint in her short novel *Yesim* (2006) set among Turkish immigrants in Vienna. She has again taken up the theme of foreigners in her novel *Zlodeji a svedkovia/Thieves and Witnesses* (2011).

Ivana Dobrakovová also regards a foreign setting as her own. This author, who lives in Italy, published

her first book in 2009, it being a collection of eighteen stories, *Prvá smrť v rodine/First Death in the Family* and in 2010 her first novel appeared, entitled *Bellevue*. The themes dominating her short stories are human relationships, both intimate and family, the relationship between daughter and father, but also the motifs of corporeality and the perceptions and experience of the human body. Elements of mystery and tension and a final surprising punch line are characteristic features. The same type of protagonist – a young girl faced with difficult situations in her life – is portrayed by Ivana Dobrakovová in her novel *Bellevue*, which is set in a centre for the physically disabled in the French town of Marseille. This prose work about the problems of the mental disintegration of a human being is accompanied by motifs of nihilism, negation and hatred; the author's more positive side is her lively language and the inner urgency of her writing.

The author who has captured most aptly young people's experience of life in foreign countries nowadays is **Zuska Kepplová**. In her prose debut *Buchty švabachom/Sweet Buns with Gothic Script* (2011) she articulated the fictive nature of the conflict between home and the world: “(...) none of us left. We did not pack our cases in the middle of the night; we did not swim across the Danube and climb over barbed wire. We simply did what everyone was talking about: Today you can travel, go to good schools, get to know people and speak to them in foreign languages... We wanted to join in, take part in the world. Scoop it up with a large spoon. Break our teeth on it. We did not leave anyone or anything. And if so, only symbolically.”

The current offer of contemporary Slovak prose is varied and polyphonic. Authors are trying to find their own paths and their own means of expression, but at the same time they are mutually communicating in the hidden layers of their texts. You only have to choose.

Translated by **Heather Trebatická**

MGR DANA HUČKOVÁ, PHD,

literary theoretician and critic, specializes in the research into Slovak literature of the 20th century and contemporary streams in Slovak literature. She has published a number of essays, papers and studies on the development of the Slovak literature of that period. In 2010 she was the head of the jury of the newly-established literary prize: the Ján Johanides Prize. She is the Director of Institute of Slovak Literature at the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava.



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Ivan Kadlečik

EIN FUNKEN IN DER KALTEN GLUT

(Leseprobe)

Die kurzen und aschgrauen Dezembertage verfließen wie Zeit, die weder unterteilt ist noch einen Rhythmus hat, wie eine sich drehende Mühle, die nichts mahlt. Damit der Dezember nicht depressiv ins Leere geht, hat man sich zur Orientierung fixierende Meilensteine ausgedacht, die da sind der Nikolaustag, der Tag der Heiligen Lucia, das Backen von Weihnachtsoblaten, die Adventssonntage und schließlich der Heilige Abend als Laterne inmitten der Einöde. Diese Ordnung hat auch eine psychologische, eine therapeutische Aufgabe. Sie ist nicht lediglich eine leere Tradition, ein Aberglaube und eine Folklore der Vergangenheit, sondern ein sinnvolles Ritual und eine Ehrerbietung.

Geschlichtet die Zeit

Rhythmus von Wörtern, Zeilen

Gedicht ist Gericht

Es ist auch eine Ordnung, eine Selbstdisziplin und ein System, das der chaotisch dahinlaufenden und banalen Zeit eine Richtung in Form eines Weges gibt, der vom Gestern zum Morgen führt. Konsumfixierte Geschöpfe, die das ignorieren und ihr Weihnachten bereits im Oktober beginnen, sind Leute ohne Vergangenheit und Zukunft, als ob sie weder Vornamen noch Familiennamen hätten. Es weiß doch selbst der Bückling, dass er in der Freiheit Hering hieß, das gilt auch für den weiblichen Bückling, was die grammatikalisch geschlechtliche Gleichstellung des Tieres betrifft: damit wir die Umweltschützer, die alles mögliche und nichts beschützen, zufriedenstellen. So kann im Slowakischen sogar ein Karpfen im grammatikalisch weiblichen Geschlecht als "hostka" auf dem Tisch stehen.

All dieser "folkloristische" Zierrat des Lebens ist im Grunde auch Poesie, er ist ein Aschenputtel, das die Gesellschaft von den Medien, ja vom Leben selbst

ausgeschlossen und in ein Ghetto gesperrt hat, als ob ein Gedicht keine Erkenntnis und kein ständiges Erkennen wäre, sei es nur in einigen wenigen Silben eines japanischen Haiku.

Zukunft im Pflanzpfropf

vergraben ist sie im Schnee

Äuglein sehen sie

Mich hat die Wunderwirksamkeit dieser Miniform bezaubert, in der man direkt mit der Realität kämpft, mit Zeit und Sprache, mit den Silben, um in deren Minimum ein Maximum an Bedeutung, Inhalt, Bildern, Stimmung, Gedanken hineinzudrängen. Dafür ist eine Menge Energie notwendig, es ist eine Explosion, komprimierte Luft, Dampf. Die enorme Anspannung einer Klaviersaite Sergej Rachmaninows. Fünf, sieben, fünf Silben, zusammen siebzehn in drei Zeilen.

Alles ungerade Zahlen, das verführt also nicht zu irgendeinem la, la, la, tralala, es ist mäßig asymmetrisch und doch zugleich symmetrisch. Es sind alles Primzahlen, denen die Mathematiker eine besondere Bedeutung und ein Geheimnis zuschreiben, Leute, die die Beziehung von Musik und Mathematik untersuchen beziehungsweise Numerologen, fanden Signale dieser Art auch in Kompositionen Johann Sebastian Bachs.

Das Wesen des Haiku hat der Dichter Ivan Štrpka hervorragend skizziert: "In der Tat ein Wunder. Eine flüsternde Böe, eine kleine Wahrnehmung aus dem Augenwinkel heraus wie eine Ewigkeit, ein Gefühl, ein Erlebnis, eine Entzündung, ein Blitz. Eine Geste, die denkt."

Ein Aschenputtel, das erstrahlt, wenn es am dringendsten notwendig ist, wenn seine Zeit gekommen ist. Es ersteht aus der Asche.

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Citát:
*An allen Seiten des Turms
befinden sich Ziffernblätter,
also vier, ein alter Scherz sagt,
damit vier Leute auf einmal
darauf schauen können,
obwohl ich mit eigenen Augen
gesehen habe, wie einmal
Vilikovský, Dušek und Mitana
alle auf einmal auf dasselbe
Ziffernblatt geschaut haben...*

Zeit ist nicht Geld

Am Hügel über der Stadt gibt es einen Weinkeller mit einem kleinen Lüftungsfenster. Etwa auf gleicher Höhe über dem Meeresspiegel befindet sich das Zifferblatt der Turmuhr und blickt mir geradezu ins Gesicht wie ein toter Vollmond oder ein fletschendes Clowngesicht, angemalt mit Zahlen und einem Schnurrbart, der sich bewegt. Er lacht die Regierenden aus, verhöhnt die "Leader". Die Zeiger bewegen sich würdevoll und ruhig, sie erinnern nicht an das neurotische und panisch ängstliche sich Krümmen der digitalen Würmer auf dem Bankkonto, dem Muster unserer heutigen Lebensart. An allen Seiten des Turms befinden sich Zifferblätter, also vier, ein alter Scherz sagt, damit vier Leute auf einmal darauf schauen können, obwohl ich mit eigenen Augen gesehen habe, wie einmal Vilikovský, Dušek und Mitana alle auf einmal auf dasselbe Zifferblatt geschaut haben, und nicht nur einmal haben dies gemeinsam auch mein Uropa Ján und meine Uroma Katarína getan.

Von ihnen, von Ján und Katarína, stammt auch die Wanduhr in meinem Arbeitszimmer, deren Klang auch in der Literatur und im Rundfunkarchiv festgehalten ist, wie ein Brief von Pavel Hružík aus dem Jahre 2003 belegt: „Gerade kam Redakteur Zaťko zu mir, ob er im Interview mit dir etwas auslassen kann, nämlich als die Uhr schlug. Gehört sie nicht aber zu den Dingen, die das ihre sagen?“

Jetzt suche ich einen klugen Meister, der die Uhr säubern, reparieren und wiederbeleben soll. Denn die Instandsetzbarkeit ist das Kriterium des Wertes. Denn nur Qualität kann wiedergeboren werden, nur eine mit menschlicher Liebe gefüllte Sache kann überdauern

– eine Kanonenladung und Toilettenpapier benutzt man nur einmal. Soll sie wieder in dem feierlichen B-Dur wie eine unverzagte und majestätische Glocke schlagen, die warnt, weint und jauchzt. Das über hundert Jahre alte Holzschrankchen ist handgeschnitzt. Es hat Messingbeschläge und dazu einen intelligent und in die ungewisse Zukunft blickenden Löwenkopf, außerdem bizarre Arabesken.

Man hat heutzutage keine Zeit, und doch geht die Uhr, diese Uhr immer noch genauso, seitdem ihr der Szegeidiner Uhrmacher János Braunschwetter dies in Übereinstimmung mit dem Weltall und der Intuition seines Verstandes vorgegeben hat. Sie wird gehen, solange sie die Anwesenheit der Gravitation spürt, denn darauf ist sie ausgerichtet. Ein Zaubermechanismus, ein Wunderschrank. Mit einem Schlag auf die richtig gestimmte Saite trifft sie mit wahren Zynismus drei Fliegen mit einer Klappe – die Gegenwart, die Vergangenheit, die Zukunft, in denen es Fantasie und Realität, Assoziationen, Geschichte, Magie, Mut und Angst, frohe und furchtbare Gewissheit gibt. Deshalb zeigt sie mir nicht nur täglich die gleichgültige Zeit an, sondern auch deren ersehnte bessere Art und ihren Sinn. Das Pendel klopft eine geheime Morsenachricht.

Ein guter Rat dem Rat

Irgendwann einmal kam der Schriftsteller Pavel Hružík an meinen Bücherschrank heran, seine lustigen Augen auf das schon auseinanderfallende broschürte Büchlein „Slowaken in der Stratosphäre“ geheftet, bis ich es ihm letztendlich schenkte mit der Widmung: Für Paľo, zu irgendeinem Geburtstag. Nach etwa einem Jahr gab

IVAN KADLEČÍK (1938),

Prosaschriftsteller, Dichter und Essayist, gehört zu den bedeutendsten slowakischen Literaten, die in den 1960er-Jahren (in den zum Schweigen gebrachten Jahren der sogenannten Normalisierung) aktiv waren. Seit 1990 ist er am Institut für Slowakische Literatur der Slowakischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Bratislava tätig. Er gehörte zum Kreis tschechischer und slowakischer Samizdat-Autoren, und in Vaculíks Edition Petlice erschienen als *Reden aus der Tiefebene* (Reči z nížiny, 1973) und *Gesichter und Ansprachen* (Tváre a oslovenia, 1974, als Buch 1990). Die damalige slowakische Realität kommentierte er in *Rapsodien und Miniaturen* (Rapsódie a miniatúry, Samizdat, 1. Bd. 1981, 2. Bd. 1987 – als Buch 1988, Brünn 1992). Sein Briefwechsel mit Ludvík



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Vaculík und Ota Filip erschien unter dem Titel *Poco rubato* (1994). Sein essayistisches Schaffen ist in den Bänden *Denkspiele* (Hlavolamy, 1995), *Letztes Jahr wie heute* (Vlani ako dnes, 1997), *Leben kann man nur autobiografisch* (Žiť sa dá len autobiograficky, 2004) zusammengefasst. Nach der

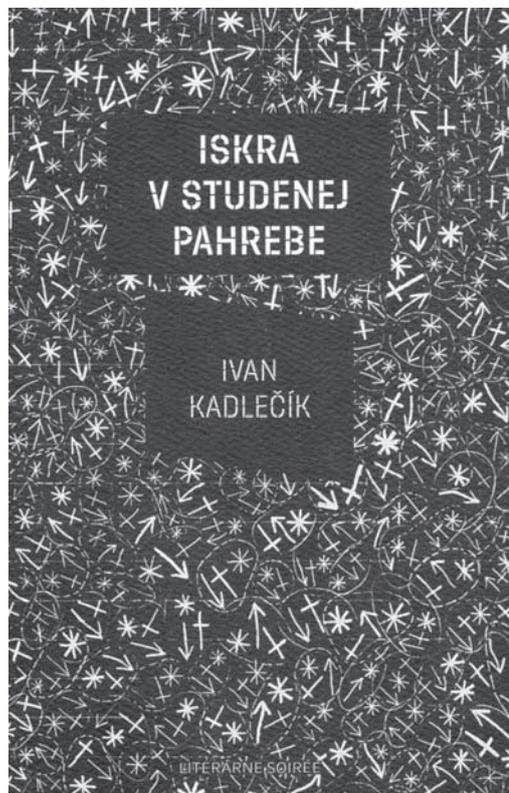
Novemberrevolution publizierte er zwei literaturwissenschaftliche Bücher und mehr als zehn Prosaerwerke. Die neuesten, *Chronoskop* (2006) und *Die Mutter der Wörter* (Matka slov, 2007), erschienen in der Buchedition der Zeitschrift Fragment. 2012 erschien sein Buch *Ein Funke in der kalten Glut* (Iskra v studenej pahrebe). Obwohl viele Texte dieses Buches bereits zuvor publiziert waren, lohnt es sich, sie in dieser zusammengefassten Form noch einmal zu lesen – wegen ihrer Weisheit und der Verteidigung des Guten: „Wir leben in sklavenartigen Kübeln, eingekesselt in einem Gewirr von Lügen, einer übersättigten Gleichgültigkeit, dem Egozentrismus der Macht, einem habgierigen und vulgären Materialismus.“ Kadlečík wurde für sein literarisches Werk der Dominik-Tatarka-Preis verliehen.

er mir das Buch zurück mit der Bemerkung auf der Titelseite: Rückwidmung: „Es gehört in Deinen Bücher-schrank, Ivan!“ Jetzt wiederum schenke ich das Buch meinem Sohn Juraj zum Vierzigsten, Paľo war Jurajs Pate gewesen.

Das Buch mit dem Untertitel *Roman* ist ein bizarrer Text, irgendetwas zwischen absurder wissenschaftlicher Fantastik und Satire, herausgegeben vom Vorstand lächelnder Philosophen in Bratislava im Dezember 1936, der Autor heißt S. Dežo Turčan, es ist mir bislang nicht gelungen, dessen Identität festzustellen. Soll doch dieser Dežo wer auch immer sein, es wird keinen Schaden anrichten, wenn ich in der gegenwärtigen wirtschaftlichen Lage an unsere Obrigkeit Turčans Ratschlag richte, obwohl ich gar nicht weiß, wer der kompetente Adressat ist. Das Parlament, die Regierung, der Präsident? Es dünkt mir, dass es womöglich die Koalition als höchstes Staatsorgan ist. Doch wer regiert insgeheim diesen Rat? Wer berät diesen Rat bei der Beratung? Soll doch Dežo beraten:

Übersetzt von **Andrea Reynolds**

Das Buch *Ein Funke in der kalten Glut* erschien im Verlag Koloman Kertész Bagala a literarnyklub, Bratislava, 2012



Vító Staviarsky

KALE SHOES

(Extract)

15

It was quite late by the time Olda and Sabina knocked on one of the doors in a block with courtyard balconies. Sabina didn't want to be a burden to anyone and disturb decent people at night, she would have preferred to go to Olda's cellar. An elderly Rom wearing a flannel cotton shirt and blue tracksuit pants opened the door, face covered in lather because he was in the middle of shaving.

'Well, well, Olda, I see you got yourself a new girlfriend?' he said with a laugh and invited them in.

'She's got no place to stay, doesn't know what to do. She's all alone. Don't turn her away, my friend,' Olda explained.

'What's your name?' the old guy asked Sabina as he turned back to the mirror to scrape the lather off his cheek with a razor.

'Sabina Giňova,' she said, like a good girl.

'Got a mum and dad?'

'I have...'

'So why don't you go home to them?'

'She can't,' Olda chipped in.

What have you been up to? You nicked something? Are the police after you?' the old guy questioned her, putting on a strict face.

'No!' Sabina was taken aback. Tears welled up in her eyes. She felt as if she was being interrogated. She was sorry she'd agreed to come. 'There's these guys looking for me.'

'Leave her alone. Can't you see she's soaked through? She's missed her train, there's no way she can get home, she'd have to sleep at the station,' Olda pleaded for her.

'OK, I'm not saying anything, but am I a boarding house or what?' the old guy said, glancing in the mirror to make sure he was shaved properly and slapping some aftershave on his cheeks. Then he handed Sabina a towel and a tracksuit so she could change in the bathroom.

Actually, the old guy wasn't as strict as he looked. He used to play the violin, he'd been a famous first violinist, but then he was in an accident, ended up with torn ligaments and a crooked arm. So he retired and now made a little extra by collecting rubbish. And since he had read

all of Karl May's books about Red Indians, people called him Winnetou. He taught Roma to read from these books in the rubbish collectors' changing room. He had seen all the Winnetou films a hundred times and knew every scene by heart. He would always say out aloud what was going to happen next, which often led to rows in the cinema. And he must have been quite religious. Sabina noticed there was a tiny shrine to the Virgin Mary in the kitchen as well as prayer books on a bookshelf among the books about Indians.

While she was getting changed, Olda must have told Winnetou the whole story about Ferdy because when she came back she found him looking grave and shaking his head, he just couldn't understand what the world was coming to and what was going on with people, what with murders everywhere and fathers selling their own daughters. How different things had been in his day! Sabina sat down on a couch under the window and as she towelled her hair dry Winnetou made her a cup of lemon tea. They talked for a while. But then Sabina got tired and started squinting so Winnetou brought her a duvet. She lay there half asleep, listening to the two men. The clock was ticking and she felt warm and cosy under the duvet. The rain outside was putting her to sleep. She felt safe. She wished she could stay here at Winnetou's until Ferdy forgot all about her. She wondered what she would do tomorrow, if she should go home, but she was too scared. She was sure Ferdy would come looking for her. Images from the flea market, the Kapitán Bar, and all sorts of other things kept flashing through her head.

The old men turned off the light in the kitchen, put on the night lamp and lowered their voices so as not to disturb her. Winnetou talked about the old days, when he was first violinist in a *kávéház* where soldiers used to play cards, and when they lost all their money they would go to an upstairs room to shoot themselves in the head. And then she heard Olda talk about the first time he had come to Košice many years ago and how he met her mother Róžika. He was with a touring circus and Róžika worked as a cleaner in a hotel. He looked her in the eye and fell in love with her straight away. 'How pretty you are, young lady!' he said. 'May I invite you for a cup of coffee?'

They got together and started living in a tiny room: all they had was a little stove, a tin cupboard and a bed. But they were happy. One day Olda wanted to show off and invited Róžika to a circus performance. He leapt onto a trapeze, clowned around and did all sorts of tricks with snakes and bears but Róžika got so scared she gave him a good drubbing on the back after the show. It was because of her that Olda gave up the circus and got himself a job as a labourer on a building site. But one evening he came home from work and Róžika was gone. After waiting for her for a while he went out and spent the whole night looking for her in the streets but she had vanished without trace. He never saw her again. But today a miracle happened because he has met her daughter. She looks exactly like Róžika did when she was young. Even her eyes are just as beautiful and velvety as her mother's. Sabina listened to him and dared not breathe.

'Why are you still here? Didn't you promise you'd be gone?' Winnetou asked Sabina when he came home from work in the afternoon and found her there. She stood in front of him looking sheepish, wiping her hands on her skirt and didn't know what to say under the old man's stern gaze.

'Leave her alone,' Olda defended her, moving his finger along the sideboard meaningfully. There wasn't a speck of dust to be seen. The place had been cleaned, the dishes washed, the rubbish taken out, everything tidied up. Even the books had been sorted according to size.

'I'll do whatever you want me to do, sir. I'll do your laundry, I'll cook for you. I used to do the laundry at home, too,' Sabina begged. But Winnetou gave her a serious look. A cat wandered out of a door hidden behind a wardrobe, followed by blind Karolko, his saxophone around his neck.

'Just a few days, Grandpa,' he stuck up for Sabina.

'Where is she going to sleep? In your room?' Winnetou was horrified. 'You would like that, wouldn't you?'

He paced up and down for a while lost in thought, his hands behind his back. He looked after Karolko and guarded him jealously. He was worried about him.

'All right then, you may stay. But I want no mischief!' he said, wagging his finger at Sabina. 'You leave Karolko alone!'

'I'm not taking him away from you!' she blurted out.

'I do know women!' Winnetou said, raising his eyebrows. 'They cause bad blood among menfolk.'

'She's not like that, Grandpa,' Karolko objected.

'Oh yeah? How do you know that?' Winnetou laughed. 'You've made friends already? Behind my back? All right then. But only for a few days. And then *dja andre* to Krompachy, double quick! This is where you'll sleep!' he said, pointing at the couch in the kitchen. 'Or else!'

Sabina was relieved. She was happy to be able to stay with Karolko. But nobody was as happy as Olda Novák. He was so pleased he started patting Winnetou on the back and immediately offered to go and buy two bottles of wine to celebrate.

In the evening they threw a *bashavel*. Sabina had a drink, too, to get Ferdy out of her head. She didn't want any of those memories to come back. The radio was turned on, Karolko had two glasses of wine and started competing with the radio to see who would play better. Then they turned off the radio because it was time for the news. Sabina wondered where all the cats had come from. She'd only seen one earlier that day but suddenly there were eight of them. They were black, striped, grey and ginger with bushy tails. They jumped about the wardrobes, chairs and the sideboard, climbed onto the table where the food was and helped themselves, and nobody chased them away. To mark the occasion Winnetou put on a white shirt and a bow tie and prayed at his little shrine, but he wouldn't have any wine. Later on, though, he did have a glass, just to

cheer himself up. Soon Olda was in such high spirits that he leapt onto the table and started dancing, frightening the cats and overturning the glasses. He invited Sabina to dance, reached his arm out and pulled her up. Karolko sat in the wardrobe playing Romany dance songs but Olda asked for *Roll Out the Barrel* and later the *Firemen's Song*. They danced on the table making the cats ran for cover under the wardrobe, meowing mournfully. Later on, as Karolko started playing fast *csárdáses*, Olda clapped his hands and thighs like a Rom from the settlement and then he knelt down in front of Sabina, clutching at his heart as if declaring his love, and Sabina gently slapped his cheek and raised her skirt, but only a tiny little bit, so as not to make Winnetou angry. She felt great and almost fell over laughing at times as Olda pulled his funny faces. He did a handstand, shouting: 'Csárdás handstand!' and started dancing on his hands. When he did a complete flip in the air, Sabina gave a squeal. She was scared he might break his neck. But Olda's feet landed firmly on the ground. And he went on somersaulting around the kitchen, turning all the chairs over. Sabina jumped off the table and when Winnetou wasn't looking she gave Karolko a quick peck on the cheek. Olda sat down on the bed, out of breath, and started bragging about the times when he was a trapeze artist in the circus. He wanted to go out on the balcony to show them a difficult acrobatic trick on the railing but Winnetou stopped him saying he was drunk and no longer fit enough. But Olda argued he would manage because he came from an old artistic family. He was the great-grandson of Vítězslav Novák.

"Do you know who Vítězslav Novák was?" Olda shouted, filling the kitchen with his voice. Sabina didn't have a clue.

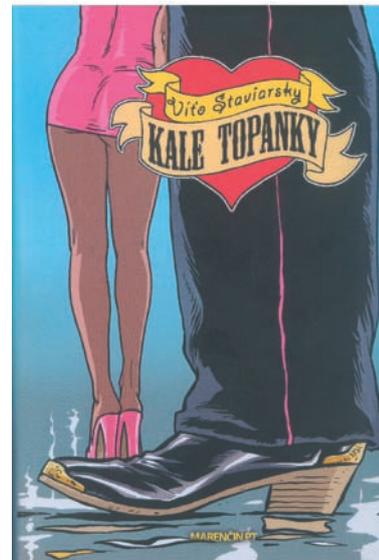
"He was a great Czech composer!"

"Oh yeah? And what did he compose?" said Sabina, laughing so much the wine came squirting out of her mouth. For a moment she thought Olda got offended because he went quiet. But he was at it again a minute later, lifted a chair and started walking around the kitchen with

his arms outspread, balancing the backrest on his nose. Then Winnetou walked over to the sideboard and took out a case. Inside was a beautiful violin, all shiny. He sat down on the couch next to Sabina, plucked the strings, raised his chin high and started playing a wonderful, plaintive song. Karolko stopped blowing his horn, everyone fell silent and listened, only a cat under the bed was meowing. And right in the middle of the beautiful song, as if by design, the cuckoo clock chimed midnight. Winnetou said it was getting late, stopped playing, and put the violin back in the cupboard. And although Sabina still felt like dancing and Olda offered to go and get some more wine, Winnetou didn't let him, saying he had to work in the morning. Sabina suddenly felt dizzy and had to sit down on the couch. She saw triple, three Oldas instead of just one. She wanted to ask him something about her mum but fell asleep immediately.

Translated by **Julia and Peter Sherwood**

The book *Kale Shoes* (Kale topanky) was published by Marenčin PT, Bratislava, 2012.



VÍTO STAVIARSKY (1960)

studied at the Čimelice Film High School and graduated in scriptwriting from the FAMU Film Academy in Prague. He has worked as stagehand, nurse at the psychiatric hospital in Prague-Bohnice, orderly at a sobering-up station, bartender and shop assistant. His first work of fiction appeared in the independent student journal "Question Mark News" (Otáznik), which was busted by the secret police in 1977. In the 1990s he focused on screenplay writing. His story *Lab Technician* (Laborant) was shortlisted for



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the Povedka 2001 short story competition. His book debut, *Kivader* (2007), a novella set among the Roma, as well as his collection of short fiction *Sobering-Up Station* (Záchytka, 2009), were nominated for the Anasoft Litera Prize. With his most recent book, the novella *Kale Shoes* (Kale topanky), published in 2012 and adapted from his screenplay *Blind Love* (Šlepa laska), he returned to the topic of the Roma community. His latest collection of blackly humorous short stories, *The Man with a Wound to His Heart* (Muž s ranou v srdci), will be published in 2013.

Silvester Lavrík

ZU

(Section 1)

Pejo

Chapter 1

Our new neighbour sprang a surprise on us. Sprang is a good word. Sprang on us. As if he'd come from nowhere. He made me think of the snowman in the children's riddle, They call me a man, but I've no wife, they gave me a body but not a life, and so on. Only this was no snowman, he was a man. A fellow. One proper stallion. By that I mean to say he exuded masculine sexuality. He wasn't standing under the window but on the terrace of a red-brick villa. The villa was opposite. Opposite, by that I mean on the other side of the street. I mention it only for the sake of order.

He was standing there and drinking tea. He had a cup in his hand. I'm deducing. The cup was too big for coffee. It was a good deal more probable than a snowman being there. Because winter was past. That was the second piece of bad news in recent times. The closure of Mrs. Semkova's grocery on the corner of Timrava Street and Koza had ruined our Christmas. Ruined. I use the word advisedly. Following the New Year the building work began there. A week ago there was a notice hanging on the entrance door. *Cafe el Escorial. Cafe el Escorial.* That it had anything to do with the new neighbour, we were not in a position to deduce this at the time. We did not have sufficient indications. Or information. There was nothing to analyse. If we'd nonetheless made the effort, it would have been pure speculation. Zu and I loved to speculate. But only about what had not happened. If something had happened really and truly, one should not speculate about it. Dad used to say that.

We decided we would not set foot in *Cafe el Escorial*. We would not speak about it. We would not take account of it. We would behave as if nothing. As if Mrs. Semkova's grocery were still there at the corner of Timrava Street and Koza. As if she'd only gone off somewhere. Leaving her *Back in a moment!* notice hanging on the door. I'm not talking about what we did in the end. I'm talking about what we decided. We didn't like changes in our locality. In our lives. A new business and a new man had appeared in our locality. We couldn't stand him even before we set eyes on him. Countering what we didn't like, we put up defences with promises. We promised that for us the new neighbour would be like the air,

unseen.

There he stood in a white shirt. Holding a cup in one hand. A saucer in the other. Sometimes he sipped from it. The cup. Only Alte drinks tea from a saucer. When he's drunk. If he gets it as far as his mouth. Zu can be ruthless towards him. Sometimes she won't give him any tea. She won't even allow me to give him tea. After what he did to Zu he's not going to get any tea from us. The new neighbour told us that in Asia too they drink tea from a plate. He told us that when we'd introduced ourselves. We hadn't wanted to be introduced to him. Lots of things we hadn't wanted to do. But we did them. Me especially. From fear, I think.

Someone may say: that's not abnormal, getting introduced to your neighbour! Which is true. And again someone else will say: getting introduced to your neighbour, waste of time! And again that's true. But what is truth as against real life? Truth is not yet wisdom, and wisdom often doesn't have much in common with truth. Truth ought to be headed in the direction of good. Otherwise it's just polishing the ego of moralists. I know that much from Dad. For the moment we'd had enough about truth. And about the new neighbour too. I'm talking about him only because I regard unsorted information as being worthless. The only way I can sort the items is by using them. I'm using memories in telling the story. There they sort themselves out.

Dad used to say it wasn't good enough to be afraid of new things. It's better to get to know them. Afterwards they're not so new. So there's no need to be afraid of them. He said that many times. He told me I ought to remember it. I don't have a problem with that. Don't be afraid of new things. Try to get to know them. It's a long time since he said it to me. I remember it. I understand it. And even so it's no help. Once again I have such a fear of everything new, they can lock me up any time. I'll tell them everything. I feel like a felon all the time. I'm having breakfast and I'm not sure if I'm committing a criminal act. A criminal act is something they can punish me for. Punish. Yes. There were many times when it seemed to me that what I was doing was all right. But they punished me for it afterwards. For example, when I managed to eat nearly a whole Saint Joseph they shouted at me. I'm a little bit less frightened only when I'm talking. I can only talk about what I know. Or what I make up. Sometimes I'm not able to distinguish precisely between what I really know and what I know only because I think that I know it. It comes in handy that Dad managed to get me deprived of legal

responsibility. Officially. In reality, legal responsibility never had any effect on me. Alte used to make fun of me, saying that when I was a child I had Mama sitting on my head. When he said that he used to laugh loudly. He made me laugh too, every time. Zu didn't like his humour. I don't know who my biological mother is. That's a good thing. That's good. I'd always be tempted to look at her bottom. To imagine her sitting on my head. It's got disadvantages too. I'm constantly looking at every woman's bottom. Alte always told me I didn't know how to look.

Pejo, all you know how to do is gape. One day they're going to split your gob.

Gob?

Or head.

The whole head?

The whole head.

The knowledge that before the law I was without legal responsibility made me noticeably calmer. Dad had to sacrifice a lot in order to acquire that status.

... it's the same as if we'd put an ad in the newspapers, saying that Pepo is mad.

The devil always shits in bulk, mother said.

That made me burst out laughing. Words like arse and shit always seemed hilarious to me. As time went on others were added to those. All of them indecent. Till they told me they were indecent it wasn't clear to me why I was laughing at them.

I know that now. Today I laugh when I remember that once I found them funny.

Is that normal? my classmates asked. Alien people.

It wasn't. So they deprived me of legal responsibility.

Dad could not have done me a better service. He'd never have decided on that, if it wasn't that various people started taking an interest in our villa. Everyone who rang our doorbell learned that we would gladly exchange it for a little house in the country. They learned that from me. Understandably. A little house just below the forest was my dream. With a horse grazing beside. Still is. To open the door was my job. Dad wasn't sound on his feet. Zu couldn't see. Mother had been dead for some years. Even if she hadn't been, that would have changed nothing. By the time she'd dragged herself to the door, the bell would have burst our eardrums with its ringing. I can only remember her in the wheelchair. A crippled woman, with one child blind and one without legal responsibility. I think that's what mother meant when she tried to pacify Dad, saying that the devil always shits in bulk. With an idiomatically codified formulation she was pointing to

the historical experience of mankind. I ask you! Once again I'm chuckling.

* * *

So then, we've got a new neighbour. I'm not losing the thread. Just that it's bothering me an awful lot. In my head. On my tongue. My head can't stand disorder. It responds defensively by forcing me to talk. Apart from that, I must wait till Zu finishes playing. Whenever anything disturbs her, what she does is sit at the piano and play. I must wait till she finishes playing. She turns round on the stool. Inclines her head. Smiles.

... so what have we got that's new in our looney little head?

It will flow out of me as if through a ruptured dike.

The villa opposite. The one built of small red bricks. That must have been frightful work. It's a fine villa. With a terrace like our own. But it's all full of cracks, the effects of the rain and snow and all those climatic things. Mainly in winter. Brrr, I can't stand winter.

Pejo, why're you telling me this?

We have a new neighbour.

I know, Zu said quietly.

She turned to the piano. She began playing again. Once more Rachmaninov. Rachmaninov is tremendous. Zu plays him when she's unhappy. Sometimes half

the day. Right round. In one go. Right round. I'm only saying this for the sake of order. I don't want to forget anything. Because it might be important. I know how that happened. But what was important in it and what wasn't, only Zu knew that. Zu isn't here now. So I have to talk everything through. To completion. Probably I'll make mistakes too. But there's no other way I can sort the memories. If I don't sort them, they will degrade me.

* * *

How am I supposed to love you, when I don't understand you? Dad asked me.

The firemen had just left.

I'm not given anything to eat, they had learned from me.

There was a huge oak in front of our villa. It's still there. An enormous oak full of years. *Quercus robur*. I managed to climb it. I didn't manage to climb down. My shoe betrayed me. It fell. They got me down from the tree.

If something is bothering you, talk to me about it, Zu

urged me that night in bed.

We were lying crossways. Then it was still possible. We'd fit in the space. We looked like two little Jesuses. In nightdresses. With splayed arms. Safely and cosily crucified.

Don't you like being with us? Dad returned to the episode with the firemen at breakfast next day.

I do.

How could you think of saying that we don't give you anything to eat?

No one would pity me for the truth.

And what's the truth?

I was interested to see if you'd look for me.

For a while nothing happened, we just ate. Then Dad spoke again.

Pejo, does Zu matter to you? Do I?

Yes.

Do you know what the question means?

Yes.

I'm asking if it interests you how we are. How we're feeling.

Yes.

Today we are sad.

Don't you like it here?

We do. We're at home here. We want it to be home for you too.

Yes.

If something matters to you, you don't want it to be troubled.

Are you troubled?

We are troubled for you.

Yes.

After breakfast Dad rose and came over to me. He caught me by the chin.

Pejo, this is important. I don't have to like the way you see the world. But I want to know what is happening in your head. In future, try asking me first.

Yes.

If I don't understand you, I won't be able to love you.

Yes.

Will you manage to remember that?

Yes.

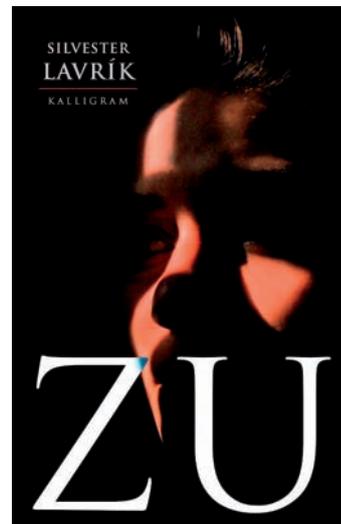
Right. Because it's really important.

I remember everything.

It was magnificent of Dad that he dealt with me like a reasonable human being. Maybe it would be better to use another word. Magnanimous. Magnanimous is better. I feel quite unsure of myself with abstract concepts. I like them. They have an effect on me like flags. Something festive. With Dad likewise I have a festive feeling. That's why I use festive-sounding words in connection with him. It was magnanimous of Dad that he dealt with me like a reasonable human being.

Translated by **John Minahane**.

The book ZU was published by Kalligram, Bratislava, 2011.



SILVESTER LAVRÍK (1964)

is a multifaceted personality in the Slovak cultural world. For the general public, he is well known as prose writer, poet, playwright, script writer, text writer and director. After studies at the Šafárik University in Prešov he studied direction at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava. He has worked in several environments and has gone through numerous jobs. Currently he is acting as director in theatres in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. He also works as project manager for Radio Litera and Radio Klasika in Bratislava. Lavrík has written 9 dramatical pieces (e.g. *Katarína* (1996), *Worlds behind the village*



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(*Svety za dedinou*, 1999), *Sota* (2001). He also wrote collection of short stories called *Allegro Barbaro* (2002), and a monodrama *Villa Lola* (2004), and other prose works *Pen drawing* (Perokresba, 2006). His first novel called *ZU* (2011) has been nominated for the prestigious Anasoft litera literary prize among ten finalists in 2012. Lavrík has received numerous awards for his dramatical works. His writings also appear in anthologies such as *Sex in the Slovak way 2. Double-sexed short stories anthology about sex* (Sex po slovensky 2. Dvojpoohlavná poviedková antológia o sexe, 2005) or *5x5* (Anthology of contemporary Slovak prose, 2011).

Ján Litvák

BRATISLAVA UPANISHADES VARANASI

The first journey to the ghat. Every morning. Through mouldering alleys. Round the spiritual treehouses. By the smoke-grimed skyblue doors. In his quilt, as in a hollow of time, a mummy slumbers. Rise up, alive or dead. I see you. Dadaji is bringing a pail of splashing milk.

Slithering steps go froglike on the slippery bricks. Barefoot. The soles slurp. They weave round the cowdung patches and the blood-red spittle-blobs. From betel-chewers, splatterers.

A cow is chewing a greenish plastic bag. Taste well? Hunger's a good sauce.

Flowers. Language a different way. Money in the hand. Gazes. Eyes. Steps to the water. Under the water. In the water. Steps for entering this water. Bustle on the bank. Young lads in festive garb and masks train their eyes on the gaunt figure's briefs. Hey, easy on that soap. Put that trident away somewhere. This is my stone. I am drinking this water. I am praising this ground.

Scientists, especially the sceptical ones, are pricks. The cows have more knowledge of these places.

Things are sacred. Splendour is a mysterious hidden element and one does not joke about its nature. This place had taken hold of me before I set foot here. It drew me out of the body. Poured me through beautiful blue tunnels like a river.

Four or five of us at least have come to Varanasi. Where will we sleep? What'll we eat?

Varanasi was drawing me out of the body and lodging me back in it for the entire journey. I was still at home, yet already I had been to Varanasi several times. I know my way round here like a hundred-year-old Brahmin.

*

A feeling, like you'd been intimately kissed by a buffalo. What have they given me? Violent as a poison. The symptoms of death have made a quick onset. Suddenly, unmistakable signs of real life. *A different way of looking.* Narrow paths. Watch out, a flying carpet. Cobra. Every creature, every form to its own image.

I am walking in a sudden twilight. It swarms through the lanes, the unlighted places. Instantaneously – for a long while now I've been watching how they're boiling milk. A lightbulb glows faintly, attached only to a wire. Just firmly enough, I suppose, not to fall in the bubbling kettle. That much light is sufficient. Round the corner there's even less.

Go where the latecomer shadows are rushing to. Needless to say: an orgy. Hands outstretched with little clay pitchers, with mugs of tin. It's boiling there. Hey, who am I here with? Someone has brought me here. Should I too reach out my hand? A thorn-apple on the board. A prickly mine, green as a chestnut shell, on the dirty, dully polished board. And in the milk? A ladle. The liquid is poured out. Liberally. Even over heads, bald patches, jug-ears, necks, shoulders. Thank you. No. I see. With another way of looking. Who am I here with? And where can one still go now? At most it's a few steps more. Millimetres of shuffling. To the navel of the world, where I shall be joined with my own navel.

My head splits open at the temple like a hazelnut. To the sky. Indigo, the river of heaven flows. With stars. Voices, flying night birds. Feathers rustling instead of hair. Hammering of little beaks. As if they were building their nests and pairing off. And singing of love. Crackle of fur. Scent of hide. The world has enough space for love – as much as will fit under a split hazelnut. Uncontrolled, the heavenly particles fly in. Insects have disappeared. They do not exist, like the register of things hitherto. Disappearance of the world in pure darkness.

It's not the first time. Careful with your further steps. This is the bank. Of the Ganges. Hand in the water. Hand on forehead. The gates are opened.

What's floating there? Flames. And between them a dead man. He extends his arms. A little bit. What if that dead man is (a little bit) me?

*

Burning hot. At the Dashaashwamedh Ghat there are naked lads with lazy smiles. Ash instead of clothes.

Sometimes I'm in the body. At any time. I drink water, I eat honey, I don't eat jam, I smoke – then. The floating continues. I am walking next to an ark that is hidden from human eyes. A stone-breaker. An earth-breaker. An airship for us, an airship.

Now I am not a human being. I am now I. Even right at the moment when I'm buying little rare objects. Amber. I drink tea by a miserable tent. Not far off there are stray dogs with no fur, just random blotches of lice-ridden hair on an emaciated hip. Eventually I wash the glass with my fingers under a dribble from the battered teapot.

One more tea at the neighbouring tent. I'll get the tea in a little disposable bowl of unburnt clay, and after drinking I'll throw it among the shards on the

opposite side of the footpath. It will break. Afterwards I translocate myself within these archaic times. Movement of the uncommon type that Chlebnikov described: They lead me like a bodhisattva, on an elephant.

*

We are walking among archaic buildings. One of the oldest cities in the world. It stands on the towers of submerged temples from distant ages. There are structures here to which no pilgrim is permitted access. Where are the hidden entrances to these places?

Stair-like broken streets lead round a little tower-dwelling. From a recess something like a man cranes out. An ancient precursor of these people, with frank eye contact. Waving his hand in the air, like a pony pawing with his foreleg. He unwraps a knotted bundle on a flat footworn stone. Carefully he extracts a button and looks at us enquiringly.

“Looks like he wants to sell it to you,” Erika says. I shake my head. Carefully he puts the button back in the bundle and takes out a ball of twine. Now he seems to want to sell the twine. I shake my head. He gazes helplessly before him. Going back into the recess, his narrow tower, he entices us to come in, but there’s hardly sufficient space for himself. Hard to imagine how he sleeps. Wound up in a ball? With feet out on the street? How does he get on with his neighbours? Probably he doesn’t disturb them too much with loud music. Or does he sing by night?

He spends a while searching for something he could sell. Between the bare walls. Once again he offers the little ball of twine, but without urgency. Who knows if he ever had today’s legal tender in his hand? What

value do these things have for him? We shrug our shoulders and go. To my dying day it will haunt me, whether I ought to have bought something from him, and instead I just walked away and left him. An untouched, rare human kind set deep in its historic times. Maybe that man was what it was all about.

*

O holy illiteracy. To write or not?

*

O letters. Colours of the sun. Vedas. Upanishads.

*

Chandogya Upanishad (134/III.7.2.2.) “There are various colours of the sun, created by emanation of the essences of the different Vedas. And the essences of the essences, the nectar of nectars, are the Upanishads.”

Khajuraho

Plants are not mischievous, nor are they ungrateful.

LENZ MOSER

A plant will feed whoever it wishes, and it has its own reasons for that. If need be, it will use all its resourcefulness.

Translated by **John Minahane**

The book *Bratislavské upanišady* (Bratislava Upanishades) was published by F.R&G, Bratislava, 2007.

JÁN LITVÁK (1965),

poet, member of the Barbarian Generation literary group. He freelances as a writer, language reviser and editor. Litvák made his literary debut with the short story collection *Autolanguage* (Samoreč, 1992). He has published two collections of poems, *King of Chalices* (Kráľ kalichov, 1998), *The Birds of Heaven* (Vtáctvo nebeské, bibliophile edition 2005, re-issued 2009). The most important part of his work consists of books on the borderlines of various literary genres, where in differing proportions he alternates poems, micro-stories and travel writing with an Indian focus:



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Gandja-san (Gandžasanh, 1999), *Vivipara. Huntress of Human Beings* (Živorodka. Lovkyňa ľudí, 2005), *I Drink Water from the Danube* (Pijem vodu z Dunaja, 2006), *Bratislava Upanishads* (Bratislavské upanišady, 2007), *Poems Washed in Cold Water* (Básne prané v studenej vode, 2010), *Orange Grass* (Oranžová tráva, 2012). Litvák is the co-compiler of an anthology of Slovak spiritual poetry, *Lost in the Lilies* (Stratená v ľaliách). He has worked as editor of a number of literary journals. At present he is preparing literary programmes for radio broadcast. He edits and reviews original and translated work.

Strawberry Bees

Waterfalls of bees
and snakes all around these.
Something sleeps in man with every sting.

Sleep is
a flock of greenish-feathered birds,
strawberry honey plate-high poured.

Konarak

That necklace the cow trod on was a dancer's, who
used to dance the whole night through.
I gallop across the river on a giraffe.
The clay disintegrates as her hooves race.
Clay on the earth's face,
grass on the ruins,
peace that the polished sand of days produced.

Only the days explore a side of us
that no one ever has perused.
Finally today we will
learn what the fakir of Konarak said,
a hundred years ago, about the miracle.

Enough to sit upon a rock
and from the noise to guess which throats:
a flock of monkeys or a flock of goats?

Through vanished lanes the goddess guides
each who'll go barefoot with her hence,
even to dark impermanence,
see her bottom sway.
Things of the world find order their own way.

What good is civilisation's spasm?
Man's key to himself is in his empty palm.
Binoculars will pick out nothing from afar
if it's not present here and round about,
if a goldblue eye's not gazing into thought.

After the girl, a slender trace
of a cool spot remains in the grass.

The Principal Language of Water

*Pilgrim, remember these words, whenever you wade into
water.
(Inscription in the sands.)*

Water is the strongest.
How many have waded into water before you?
Ask the days, when you return.
Follow the flight of heaven's birds and the heavenly
bodies, the counter-currents, the shine and the
dulled fury of the surface that hungers.
Share your food with water, with the fishy smell and
the ducks.
Don't disturb them while feeding.
You step barefoot into water and you carry your life in
your hands.
The cormorants' shriek is more intelligible to water
than human words.
The shrilling of the kingfishers, whose nest the
fishermen knocked over, will forever be repeated by
the reeds as their most cryptic song.
Murmur accompanies every movement, but there are
more silent surfaces too.
Water journeys onwards.
Traverses the bodies of pilgrims.
Splashes over them.
Have you praised that language?
Have you heard that tongue?
Where were you, if you were not by water?
Carry water in vessels, whenever the opportunity
arises.
Give water to flowers and the slender arboreal kinds.

Water is the strongest.
Speech that is uttered by water will remain in the land,
and above the surface it shall be borne afar.
The riverbank, fortified by the alders' roots, is
a rendezvous of the land's defensive powers.
The secret of the soil's fertility is guarded by the trees,
to which the rivers tune their flow.
The sigh of the willow leaves is an echo of the mother
tongue.
Whether you have a brother or none, along the
waterline you are blood brother of the savage who
understands all important things, even though he
understands no others.

Translated by **John Minahane**
The book *Oranžová tráva* (Orange Grass) was published
by F.R&G, Bratislava, 2013)

Peter Šulej

(F, FOREST)

dekrét* of the deep forests devastated by mining and
smelting
(full of animals but minus the hunting-lodge lords as
nimrods)
reconstructed the woodlands for us with manifold
competence
[voice: he planted a world of his own]

and today even blown hither and thither they do not
touch
the cuckoo concealed in her nest ...
brooks you may vainly scream celadon inflow alfeia
witterers chatterers
they have nonetheless flown away
free-floaters

[voice: the birds of heaven]

et hic sunt:

(in places a well of doubts
springs of insolubilities)

the lost ones perhaps now a rabble appreciated
nothing
they were ignorant of the advances in monasterology
and over the ruins they blindly
reeled – footled about
they seek the entrance to the forest and shall not find
without transcendence
fief-folk

[voice: scarecrows in the field]

wee big cities in a wee big country
ach simpletons woodenheads one was called

zwentibold
(and the one before him samuel)
such wee weeny
weensy
figurillas

[voice: the catty cats]

this ground has a lack of unflagging interest
and even mulching won't help now
everywhere everywhere we see
bursting through
into god's light
filles-de-joie

[voice: rip up the weeds]

please believe me really i'm a good analyst
not so much a mirror more a kaleidoscope

*dekrét= Jozef Dekret Matejovic (1774-1841), famous as
a pioneer of reforestation in Slovakia.
Samuel, Zwentibold = two famous rulers of the Central
European Slavs, Samo (7th century) and Svätopluk
(9th century).

teaching in the field (city)

the taste-cleansing bite signalled a time of
transformations
insufficient for the wine's maturity
our palate can register only the candy-stick culture
to which we have finally made our way

PETER ŠULEJ (1967),

poet, prose writer, publisher
and editor. He studied at the
Technical University in Košice.
After graduation he worked in
a number of professions, including
programmer and editor in Slovak
Radio. In 1994 he established the
Drewo a srd publishing house.
He is editor-in-chief of the cultural
and artistic journal *Vlna*, and
since 2003 he has been organiser
and programme planner of the
Ars poetica poetry festival. Peter
Šulej has written the prose works
Mission (Misia, 1995), *Electronic*



Photo © ???

Cafe (Elektronik café, 2001) and
History (História, 2009), and
seven collections of his poetry
have appeared, including *Porno*
(1994), *Cult* (1996), *Pop* (1998),
Archetypal Summer (Archetypálne
leto, 2003), and *End of the Blue
Period* (Koniec modrého obdobia,
2008). His texts have been
translated into many languages,
appearing in journals and in
a number of anthologies. For his
sci-fi prose work *Mission* (Misia,
1994) he received the Karel Čapek
Prize.

(night is upon bánska bystrica
though the europa centre shines brightly)

whatever may happen the balls will be held in the
synagogue
(ultimately it's a good thing that caroberto won at
rozhanovce)
the hornad river mostly flows sluggishly
the barges have vanished for good with the magyar
maidens
and the private gold treasure

and even the nights in this danubian city
(oh where is all your caviar) huso huso
belong no more to us danacans you see /
just occasionally somewhere or other stealthily
we observe the aged angels
swords safely in their scabbards
beautifully adorned

in a chinese bistro knights of the rosary after the
sunday sermon
to mouths to eyes sweet sour young bibles
you could have been the girl with pearls in her hair
ach lazybones... woven twig of a cherry tree
in the downwards current
schelinger
towards budapest

and hundred-towered too / to more than one
smíchov karlín libeň...
libuša had never seen the like
vyšehrad old town město nové...
blow-ins & outsiders
střešovice strašnice vysočany vršovice...
/ mother / grew upon
žížkov braník nusle...
/ of cities

[to know how much more you can get away with that's
what the city's all about
and poetry too
(he who opened the first wing and wasn't a tuner
would have a tale to tell)]

afterwards there were many who strayed in the country
of the niebelungs...

in the end farther even than the eye of brendan the

navigator saw
cities districts parks streets homes gardens...
and stories

the thurzo-fugger buildings' diamond pattern
unfailingly draws the artist
ever and ever
back home
home

xxx

ascent:: halt:: mezzoropa: system of rubble-mounds
fuori le mura
(though even this is a regular place for poetry like
anywhere else)
we ended up here with the spirit of the *stalker*
here prestige is sleeping with the beauty
stalled periphrastic time
(helveticisation will not await us nor brusselisation
either)
into the zone secretly stealthily /
chapel

we have ceased to believe in our own country and even
in the world
(sperm on the silken backs of call-girls)
by varying detours we approach the goal
not noticing the tiniest thing about the system
(ach honeychild our states somehow /
have changed to compossessorates / the owners
as always unknown
the nonage paid)

/ we nonetheless from ages past entered the forests
gathered and observed
if the scraps of pine needles floating in space are an
expression of the architect
naos today is empty faxes forgotten
tapes erased

from as far as my vinyl memory stretches
with a fly-whisk my only weapon
i've been a borderer
i guard the world
paral.lel

Translated by **John Minahane**

Maroš Krajňák

ENTROPIE

(Leseprobe)

6

Forel und Buko laufen unermüdlich. Ihr Ziel ist die galizische Stadt Butschatsch, wo das versteckte ausgestorbene Dorf Kurdybanivka liegt. Denn dort lebt noch eine einsame Greisin. Sie war Pepos Frau. Zu ihr müssen sie laufen, schreiten oder auf gezähmten Tieren reiten. Sie können nur in den Baumkronen und Flussbetten schlafen. Nur die Früchte essen, die ihnen der Wald gibt, und nur Quellwasser trinken. Und so werden sie Wasser aus den Quellen der Töpl, Ondava, Oslawa, San, Usch, Latorica, dem Dnjestr und Stryj, der Boržava, Teresva und Theiß trinken. Das letzte Mal werden sie aus der Theiß trinken und dann bis ans Ziel laufen. Kurdybanivka. Vielleicht vierhundert Kilometer von der Stadt mit dem Neptun entfernt, wo sie vor einem Augenblick die Münzen aus dem Dreizylinder geholt und dann in Geldscheine gewechselt haben. Nur mit diesen Geldscheinen können sie im Wald Feuer machen. Nirgends können sie mit ihnen zahlen. Nur im Regen können sie sich waschen. Sie müssen in den Osten. Sie können nur mit Verrückten, Dämonen und verlassenen Alten reden. Sie werden durch die Karpaten laufen und dann in den weiten Krater hinabsteigen, wo einst die Schwarzerde lag, die von deutschen Zügen ins Reich gebracht wurde. Buko und Forel werden zwei Wochen brauchen, um nach Kurdybanivka zu laufen, vielleicht weniger. Und wenn sie das Geheimnis von Pepos Schnelligkeit entdecken, werden sie in Windeseile heimkehren.

Buko und Forel laufen auf einem staubigen, kurvigen Feldweg, der das gelbgrüne Gras einer sonnenverbrannten Wiese säumt. Dieser Weg ist der Rücken einer Schlange, deren Kopf vorne ins Gestrüpp des beginnenden Waldes reicht. Die Schlange frisst alle Früchte und kleinen Säugetiere auf, indem sie sie bedächtig in ihren langen, gemusterten Körper saugt. Sie kann den ganzen Wald und auch den Himmel darüber erreichen, darum kann sie auch fliegende Vögel fangen. Sie sperrt ihr Maul auf, atmet leise und langsam ein, erwischt dadurch so viel wie möglich und schließt ihr Maul dann wieder. Alles vermischt sie mit ihrem Speichel und verschlingt es. Die gefressenen Dinge durchwandern langsam den ganzen Körper und fallen später unbeschädigt am anderen Ende hinaus. Die Schlange ist daher gleichzeitig auch ein Weg, der einen unsichtbaren Durchgang zurück ermöglicht.

Am Rande des Waldes steht eine Kirsche mit dichten Zweigen. Darunter liegt ein zehnjähriger Junge, der sich vor Schmerzen krümmt, weil er gerade von diesem

Baum gefallen ist. Sein Vater eilt herbei und verpasst ihm kräftige Fußtritte. Er tritt zuerst einige Male mit dem rechten Bein, dann mit dem linken, dann wechselt er die Beine bei jedem Tritt mit wahnwitzigem Tempo. Der Junge windet sich vor Schmerzen und weint.

„Ich habe dir ja gesagt, dass ich dich treten werde, wenn du fällst!“ schreit sein Vater und tritt weiter. Neben ihnen taucht ein Mensch auf, der sich krankhaft einbildet, er habe stinkende Knie. Der schaut dem tretenden Vater eine Weile ins Gesicht, dann kauert er sich zum weinenden Jungen, benetzt mit dessen Tränen die eigenen Handflächen und bestreicht damit seine Knie. Danach erhebt er sich und läuft ins Unterholz, wo ihn die Riesenschlange verschlingt. Später entschlüpft er der Öffnung auf der anderen Seite. Er befindet sich im Dorf, wo er wohnt.

Vor Jahren befreite die Rote Armee das Dorf. An diesem kleinen Ort fielen dreitausend ihrer Soldaten. Bis heute liegen hier deren Körper. Viele sind bedeckt mit einer Schicht aus Lehm, der nach der Explosion der feindlichen Geschosse hoch in die Luft geworfen wurde und dann zurück auf die Erde fiel. Viele wurden von den gewaltigen fliegenden Erdstücken, die die explodierenden Bomben der Geschütze, Panzer und Flugzeuge empor geschleudert hatten, lebendig begraben. Bis heute stoßen die Dorfbewohner auf Leichen. Das geschieht, wenn sie Baugruben für neue Gebäude ausheben oder bisher brachliegendes Land pflügen. Jeder Dorfbewohner besitzt deshalb einige sowjetische Helme. Das sind nur mehr große Eierhälften aus rostigem Blech, deren Auskleidung die Dörfler entfernt haben. Die Helme liegen in den Höfen herum und die Einheimischen geben das Futter für die Hühner und die anderen Haustiere hinein. Bei jedem Haus liegen die Helme. Wenn einer völlig zerfällt, wird er durch einen anderen ersetzt.

Einmal, vor Jahren, kam ein fremdes gelbes Auto ins Dorf. Es fuhr ein paar Mal von einem Ende des Dorfs zum anderen und blieb schließlich an einer Stelle stehen, die eine schöne Aussicht auf die Umgebung bot. Die Insassen stiegen aus und breiteten auf dem Gras eine Decke aus. Davor platzierten sie einen weißen Klapp-tisch, auf den zwei Frauen Essen und Getränke stellten. Zwei Männer saßen auf der bedeckten Erde, stützten ihre Ellbogen auf die Knie und betrachteten das unten liegende Dorf. Um sie herum kreisten die Dorfjungen mit ihren Fahrrädern. Als diese bemerkten, dass das Auto ein sowjetisches Nummernschild hatte, begannen sie, den Rastenden naive Schmähungen zuzurufen.

Die Fremden verstanden nicht. Dann hatte einer der Männer den Einfall, die Jungen zu sich zu rufen. Fast alle erschrecken und fahren schnell weg. Es blieb nur der kleine H., der zuerst zögerte und sich dann den Leuten auf der Decke näherte. Diese erklärten ihm, dass sie gekommen seien, um sich den Ort anzusehen, an dem ihr Verwandter gestorben sei. Die ältere der beiden Frauen sei seine Gattin gewesen. Sie gaben dem kleinen H. große Schokoladebonbons. Dann ging H. still weg.

Der Typ, der glaubt, er habe stinkende Knie, ist der inzwischen erwachsene H. Er sitzt gerade in der Kneipe. Er streitet mit einem Menschen, der behauptet, er habe H.s Eier gesehen. Sie seien mit grünem Filzstift bemalt. H. habe das angeblich selbst getan. „Du bist ein H. und ihr H.s habt alle bemalte Eier. Auch Freddie H., der bei Warhol war, hat sie sich mit Silberspray besprüht“, wiederholt dieser Mensch in einem fort. H. aus dem Dorf geht hinaus. Wild entschlossen eilt er zu seinem Haus, wo er allein lebt. Im Hof blöken die hungrigen Lämmchen, was ihn noch wütender macht. Er nimmt einen Spaten und erschlägt damit alle Tiere. Er tritt die

rostigen sowjetischen Helme, aus denen die Tiere gefressen haben, dann schluchzt er eine Weile jämmerlich bei ihren toten Körpern und lernt auf diese Weise an sich selbst das gesamte verfügbare Ausmaß des karpatischen Wahnsinns und Sentiments kennen. Später kehrt er beruhigt in die Kneipe zurück, wo unerwartet ein lang verschollener Landsmann aufgetaucht ist, der alle einladen will und ein Wetttrinken ausruft. Und so trinken alle. Niemand muss etwas zahlen, wenn er das gesetzte Ziel erreicht. Auch H. trinkt, alle trinken, niemand verliert und der Landsmann zahlt mit Freude.

In der Nacht wechseln einander für eine Weile die Jahreszeiten ab. Heute verwandelt sich der Juli in den Januar. H. geht hinaus, er ist allein. Er ist von der Kälte schon ganz zusammengequetscht. Als hätte sie seine Gliedmaßen gekürzt. Er kann den Kopf mit dem festgeklemmten Kiefer gar nicht mehr bewegen. H.s Schritte werden immer kürzer. Die Absätze schaben nur mehr langsam über den Boden. Seine bemalten Hoden und das Glied haben sich ganz zusammengezogen, er ist zu einem kalten, geschlechtslosen Geschöpf geworden. H. will sich den Weg abkürzen, deshalb wählt er die Längsseite des rechtwinkligen Dreiecks und vermeidet auf diese Weise die Brücke. Er steigt zum Bach hinunter. Aber steif wie er ist, kann er nicht hinüberspringen. Er steht am Rand des Lichtkegels, der aus einer Straßenlaterne fällt. Er blickt zur Laterne und fühlt auf einmal Wärme. Er fühlt, dass die Lampe eine verkleinerte Sonne ist, die zufällig in einen hohlen Betonpfeiler gestürzt

ist. Schon quillt sie hinaus, gleich wird sie frei sein und wieder zurück in den Himmel steigen. Darum entschließt sich H., an diesem Ort auf die Sonne zu warten. Er setzt sich in den kalten, vom Bach angespülten Kies und lauscht dem Murmeln des Wassers, das unter einer Eisschicht fließt. H.s Gesicht ist die ganze Zeit den gelben Lichtstrahlen zugewandt, die jeden Moment Wärme bringen werden. Er sitzt da und krempelt sich die Hose auf, um an seinen Knien riechen zu können. Diese stinken noch immer, also richtet er sich die Hose wieder. Nach einer Weile streckt er sich auf dem Kies aus und erfriert. Jetzt ist seine Seele auf dem Weg in die

Verdammnis. Zu Lebzeiten frönte H. der Genusssucht. Er konnte nie warten. Es war, als bestätigte er ständig die Ergebnisse der Tests des John von Neumann, indem er mit jeder Sünde einen Schalter drückte, mit dem er bekanntgab, dass er nicht auf das himmlische Königreich warten werde, um stattdessen lieber jetzt schon die Wonne auszukosten.

H.s Körper findet in der Früh der Dorfbürgermeister. Dieser eilt in seinen braunen glänzenden Schnürmokassins, die er durch Niederretreten der Fersen in bequem anzuziehende Schuhe verwandelt hat, in Trippelschritten zur Kneipe, um festzustellen, wie der gestrige Abend ausgegangen sei. Er will zur Brücke abbiegen, als er H. daliegen sieht. Er steigt zu ihm hinunter, redet ihn an und wartet, ob sich die Lider mit den weißen, bereiften Wimper bewegen. Der Bürgermeister rüttelt an H.s hartgefrorener Schulter, dann springt er erschrocken auf und läuft weg. Zusammen mit dem Kneipenwirt ruft er die Polizei. Mit den Verwandten bespricht er das Begräbnis. Auf der Bank vor der Kneipe sitzt schon seit einigen Stunden eine junge Zigeunerin. Neben ihr tanzt und singt ihre vierjährige Tochter. Keine von ihnen hat auf dem Weg hierher H.s Körper, den man nun schon weggebracht hat, bemerkt. Die Zigeunerin hat die Ellbogen auf ihre übereinandergeschlagenen Beine gestützt und zieht an den Zigaretten, die sie sich hier gekauft hat. Sie denkt an H., der sie jahrelang erfolgreich verführt hat. Jäh fährt sie ihre Tochter an, sie solle ruhig sein. Diese hält einen Moment inne und blickt, an die Bank gelehnt, in dieselbe Richtung wie ihre Mutter. Dann beginnt sie wieder zu singen und zu tanzen.

Wieder schreit die Mutter sie an, versetzt ihr einen Schlag auf den Kopf. Wieder hält das Mädchen für einen Moment still. Der Wirt kommt zu ihnen heraus auf die Terrasse. „Kaufen Sie ihr was, dann wird sie folgen“, sagt er zur Zigeunerin und blickt in dieselbe Richtung. „Bringen Sie Bonbons“, antwortet diese, ohne sich zu rühren. Der Wirt geht hinein, kommt nach einer Weile

Die Muster für die Erschaffung der Menschen der anderen Nationen seien, ohne weitere logische Regeln, andere Tiere. Darum seien einige Slawen den Adlern nachgebildet, andere den Hirschen, Rehen, Luchsen oder irgendwelchen anderen Tieren.

zurück, reißt ein knisterndes Säckchen auf und gibt es dem Mädchen. Er nennt der Zigeunerin den Preis. Sie zählt ihm die Münzen stumm in die Hand. Der Wirt, der sich auch als Lebensmittelhändler betätigt, ist ein intelligenter Mensch. Er verkauft fast an das ganze Dorf billige Lebensmittel, billige Kosmetikartikel, billige Zigaretten, billigen Alkohol. Die Zigaretten und Kinderwindeln verkauft er stückweise. Reich machen ihn vor allem die arbeitslosen Alkoholiker und die Zigeunerkin- der, die auf dem Weg in die Schule immer Süßigkeiten kaufen. Der Wirt ist sich bewusst, dass er seinen Kunden die ungesundeste und schlechteste Ware anbietet, aber er verhindert, dass seine Selbstvorwürfe tiefer einwirken, indem er sich innerlich zuflüstert: „Etwas anderes würden sie ohnehin nicht kaufen, sie würden es ohnehin nicht kaufen.“

Buko und Forel laufen noch immer auf derselben staubigen Straße durch die Karpaten. Sie sind über den Rücken und den Kopf der großen Schlange gelaufen, die sie mehrmals verschluckt und wieder zurückgeworfen hat, aber beim zehnten Versuch erlaubt sie ihnen, weiterzulaufen. Gerade jetzt haben sie einen ganzen Wald durchquert. Auf der anderen Seite weitet sich der Raum. Sie bleiben stehen und blicken in ein Tal, wo eine mittelalterliche Stadt liegt. Forel sagt unvermittelt, dass er ein slawisch-germanischer Mischling sei. Er sagt, dass er über dem offenen Abgrund zwischen beiden Seiten schwebe und in Zivilisationssprüngen dazwischen hin- und herwechsle. Hin und her, hin und her, hin und her. Von dort schaue er auf die Schöpfung und entdecke in verschiedenen Details den versteckten Teufel, ein andermal Gott. Er schaue auf die slawischen Frauen als ein Germane und sehe ihre überlegene Schönheit und sehe, wie diese Frauen sich für immer mit jenem anderen Teil der Welt vereinigen wollen, weil sie deren Übermacht und Kraft spürten. Dann wieder schaue er als ein Slawe auf die germanischen Frauen und sehe,

wie anziehend auf sie seine Spontanität wirke und seine Fähigkeit, sie zum Lachen zu bringen, sie zu überraschen und in ihnen eine neue, unbekannte Emotion hervorzurufen. Diese Frauen wollen ihn für eine kurze Zeit berühren, sich seiner bemächtigen und seine Leidenschaft aufsaugen. Forel sagt noch, dass als Vorlage für die germanischen Frauen die Wölfinnen dienten und für die germanischen Männer die Bären. Aus deren Vereinigung werden stets von neuem kleine Wölfinnen und kleine Bären geboren. Die Muster für die Erschaffung der Menschen der anderen Nationen seien, ohne weitere logische Regeln, andere Tiere. Darum seien einige Slawen den Adlern nachgebildet, andere den Hirschen, Rehen, Luchsen oder irgendwelchen anderen Tieren. Diese Wahllosigkeit der tierischen Vorlage gelte für alle außer für die Germanen, denn diese blieben für immer Wölfinnen und Bären.

Übersetzt von **Simon Gruber**

Das Buch *Entropie* (*Entropia*) erschien im Verlag Trio Publishing, Bratislava 2012



MAROŠ KRAJŇÁK (1972)

Prosaiker, studierte er an der Comenius-Universität in Bratislava Sozialarbeit. Im Jahr 2006 schloss er sein Studium an der International Business School in Brünn ab. Beruflich ist er seit langem im Marketing für den Telekommunikations- und Onlinebereich tätig. Sein erfolgreiches Buchdebüt *Carpathia* (2011), eine literarische Erforschung des ruthenischen Gebiets mit Reflexionen über das Schicksal dieses Landstrichs und seiner Bewohner, erreichte das Finale des Wettbewerbs Anasoft litera. Das zweite Buch des Autors trägt den Titel *Entropie* (*Entropia*, 2012). Es handelt sich um eine Geschichte voller Fantasie, voll bizarrer,



Photo © ???

ja halluzinatorischer Bilder. Der Autor unternimmt eine Art Expedition in eine eigentümliche Welt einander

überschneidender Ethnien und Kulturen – eine Reise durch Raum und Zeit, auf der der Leser eine magische Geschichte über Schuld und Strafe, über die Geheimnisse der Vergangenheit und vielleicht auch der Zukunft durchlebt. Die Handlung spielt in den slowakischen, polnischen und ukrainischen Karpaten, wo die Ruthenen leben bzw. lebten, in der galizischen Ukraine in einem kleinen, fast ausgestorbenen Dorf, in der slowakischen Stadt Prešov (im Buch heißt sie die Stadt mit dem Neptun), aber auch im kanadischen Toronto. Das Wort „Entropie“ ist in der Physik ein Maß für das Chaos, das in einem geschlossenen Raum unvermeidlich zunimmt.

Peter Krišťufek

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAF MAN

(Extract)

In Brežany the war actually started a number of times.

His arms full of papers, the news vendor shouted in the square: *War's broken out!* That was when the Italians invaded Ethiopia in nineteen thirty-five. It's said this came as such a shock to the notary, Mr Levendovský, that his pince-nez fell into the coffee he was drinking in Puškár's pastry shop and broke. Well, yes – maybe it only slipped into a half-eaten cream and custard pastry and got a bit spattered with cream – but like that it sounds duly dramatic. That was the first time.

Ever since then and for the rest of his life my father hated the Italians – he couldn't understand why they had used planes and machine guns to attack fleeing half-naked natives armed only with arrows. Fuming with rage, he declared they were nothing but degenerate Romans, the terminal stage of a great ancient civilization that once proudly dominated Europe and nowadays could do nothing better than hang around in the street and wolf-whistle at girls. It's true that also requires a certain skill, but...

He didn't change his opinion even when the Cat Man, Fellini in Italian, appeared on the scene with his films, which everyone, myself included, immediately adored. Along with the loiterers and whistling.

The second time the war began was in the summer of 1938.

Mum used to say that warm, peaceful, serene summer was the most beautiful in many years. The very air persuaded us that the world was a safe and fragrant place. Freshly bottled plums and apricots gleamed in the cellar when we happened to steal in there and open a jar before we should, the lid under pressure making a popping sound. I remember that Vojto got a beautiful dark-brown boomerang from his father then and we spent whole days playing with it. Occasionally it flew off into the raspberry bushes at the end of the garden and we had to go and look for it, but in the end we learned to throw it so that it came back for us to catch.

Into this idyll some odd fellow (Dad said it was the Czechoslovak prime minister, Hodža) kept lamenting over the radio and when he was not lamenting they at least played sad music. Dad couldn't tear himself away from the receiver in case he should miss the latest news in these troubled times. Our Sunday lunch began to

look like a wake without a deceased. Everyone looked grave and when Uncle Armin was on the point of making jokes about it (he loved jokes about funerals and the dead) they silenced him with chilling looks. The radio dominated the whole house.

Then, in September 1938, when in Brežany's *kino Slovan* cinema (shortly before it was renamed *kino Slovák* by adding and acute accent and replacing the last neon letter) they were showing the film of Lehar's operetta *The Land of Smiles* with the tenor Richard Tauber, whose monocled grin decorated many of the cigarette cards Dad used to find in his parcels, my parents came out of the cinema into the Main Square with the song *Dein ist mein ganzes Herz* on their lips and learned that mobilisation had been ordered, on account of the threat of war with Germany. It was exactly the twenty-third of September – I remember that, because I had just spilled hot chocolate over myself at Vojto's birthday party. Dad bought a newspaper from the vendor on the corner and there it was in big letters. He stopped and read the article by the light of the street lamp, while Mum kept prodding him nervously, wanting to know the details.

We were playing with the boomerang in Vojto's garden when we heard Vojto's father turn up the radio. A swing melody was suddenly cut off in the middle and an agitated voice called: *Your attention please!* Vojto's dog Letov – he got the name from the type of aeroplane Second Lieutenant Roško used to fly – lifted his head, as if he understood what they were talking about, his whole body shook and he began to whine. He looked to Vojto's father for protection, and kept pressing up against him; he just wouldn't stop. He got under his feet and had to have his head stroked until he calmed down at least a bit – this only being finally achieved with a large piece of ham. When I recounted this strange thing to my father he said the dog must have sensed the worried tone of the voice and perhaps also the personal odour of the listeners.

The tension in Brežany culminated with the departure of the young men, who were compelled to enlist. A blackout was imposed and the local radio kept drawing attention to the fact. Vojto and I spent hours searching the sky in the expectation of the first air raid. We just couldn't imagine it and therefore we were rather looking forward to it.

Vojto told me that when he went for a pee in the night

the light was still on in the kitchen. His father was sitting there, preoccupied with cleaning his service weapon. He was doing it very thoroughly, while from the radio came an announcer's voice that was going on about some German town, somewhere over the hills and far away. Munich. As the Slovak name Mníchov reminded me of monks (mních) it conjured up an image of a monastery – cold walls, shaven heads and Jesus hanging on the cross at every corner.

The next day, when my father was making his way through the square to Armin's barber's shop as usual, someone agitatedly explained to him that we had surrendered the Sudetenland to Germany. This really didn't mean anything whatsoever to me. At first I supposed it was some building components, and then that it must be something sweet. To my great disappointment no planes came flying over – although I dreamed about it several times in the night.

A couple of days later, at the beginning of October, a Slovak autonomous government was constituted, led by a certain priest who was hanged for that a few years later. Jozef Tiso was on the plump side and rumour has it that the hanging did not go too smoothly. But for the time being everything was being put in order again. People were glad that Slovakia was becoming independent, they talked about *insufferable Czech oppression* and books began to quietly disappear from the libraries – those that said that Czechoslovakia was a good thing. Or those that declared the Soviet Union to be a fine country whose example we should all follow.

Various strange things began to happen. One Saturday my father took Mum, Tina, Peter and I out for lunch to the restaurant in the Golden Stag Hotel. We found a table with a view onto the sunny autumn street.

During the hors d'oeuvre a short stout neatly-dressed man wearing a badge with a two-barred cross on his chest noisily got up from the next table. When he passed us on his way out he muttered half aloud that he wouldn't sit in the same restaurant with a Jewish woman. This hung in the air for a moment and Mum stopped eating. The waiter cleared his table, brushing off the crumbs, pushing in the chair and mechanically picking up the empty plate, while inconspicuously observing my mother. When she caught his gaze, he turned away and pretended to be looking elsewhere. Dad wanted to say something, but couldn't find suitable words, even when we quickly paid the bill and left.

The short man did not introduce himself, but as all roads, no matter how winding they may be, lead to the doctor's, a month later he was sitting hunched over in Dad's waiting room. Recognisable only thanks to his badge, he entered the surgery in a pitiful state. All I know is that when Dad wanted to give him an injection, he

protested and angrily shouted that when they'd done that to his aunt she had died the next day. Then for some similar reason he had refused to be X-rayed and left in a huff. Dad found out that his name was Gajdoš and he was the secretary of the local branch of the People's Party.

When Dad was having a shave a few days later, Uncle Armin came out with the rumour that Dad was to be *removed* from Brežany and that the Hlinka Guard had a hand in it and that Dad's colleague Doctor Ducký had his fat fingers in the pie too. Ducký had his surgery in the Main Square and claimed that Dad was stealing his patients and undercutting him by asking far too little for the different procedures, while he couldn't even arrive

at a reliable diagnosis. Dad knew that spreading such rumours abroad worked better than if Ducký had submitted a complaint to the Medical Chamber.

And then one evening, on returning from his rounds, visiting his patients, he found a letter awaiting for him in the letter box. It read:

Citát: doplníme

“As on the basis of a denunciation a suspicion has arisen that your origin is not purely Aryan, the Municipal Notary's Office urges you to submit for inspection at the earliest date birth certificates of your ancestors, and that going back to the fifth generation.”

Although this was no easy task, Dad complied with the request and for a while there was peace.

When a week later another letter arrived, together with an application form to join the Hlinka Guard, he went around lost in thought, only giving one-word answers to any questions, and in the end he filled it in and sent it off without consulting anyone. He told me this many years later – when our conversation had only one listener, though two participants. Dad claimed he had wanted to protect Mum, but he may have done it simply to be left in peace.

He subscribed to the *Gardista*. On the very first page it published contributions and speeches by leading German Nazis, combined with weird militant rhymes, which were produced with zest for example by Ján Smrek, the idol of Vojto's mother Natália, or the promising young poet Ján Kostra. One of these was called *Before the Battle* and we had to learn it by heart at school: *May a Slovak stone/ harden in our catapults/ Oh, someone will be cut down/ oh someone will fall face down/ oh someone will lick their wounds/ in the Slovak soil...!*

As editor-in-chief they chose the writer Milo Urban, who after the war was one of the first to realise that above all people adore reformed sinners and he wrote a history of the Slovak state from the point of view of a convinced communist. After all, the Bible is also full of stories of radical conversions – these are among the greatest hits.

And as you could never be quite sure you were not being observed by someone's inquisitive eye, at the beginning

of the year Dad ordered a beautiful monograph about the Hlinka Guard with a moving speech by Emo Bohúň. It remained, however, carefully wrapped up in paper with the cash-on-delivery receipt stuck under the edge. In this form it later ended up ceremoniously among the waste paper collected for recycling.

A similar fate awaited the splendid epic publication about the Hlinka Transport Guard, which my father received along with a recommendation which read: *Brother Eduard Gajdoš has been appointed by the editorial office and administration of the publication HTG-Its Establishment and Work for the purpose of its distribution and sale. The Headquarters of the Vth Division of the HTG in Brežany highly recommends it, as it also includes the history of the Brežany HTG.*

And as this history covered an incredibly short space of time, everyone who was allowed to contribute to the book zealously swore that on 5th June 1938 during the great demonstration for autonomy in Bratislava, where ardent speeches had been made to the effect that the Czechs had not kept to the Pittsburgh Agreement, they had heroically been right on the spot. If not actually physically present, then at least in spirit.

I came to realise a long time ago - and not just like this in the night, in an empty, almost non-existent house, with several drops of Noax diffusing in my brain - that the history of Slovakia consists of proving that you were in the right place at the right time.

To demonstrate this - what were you doing, for example, on 14th March 1939? In each case one of two answers is suitable, cross out whichever does not apply: I was shouting at the top of my voice in Hlinka's Square and my windows were decorated with garlands. / On that day I most certainly did not go to any place of

importance - I was planting gladiolas in my garden.

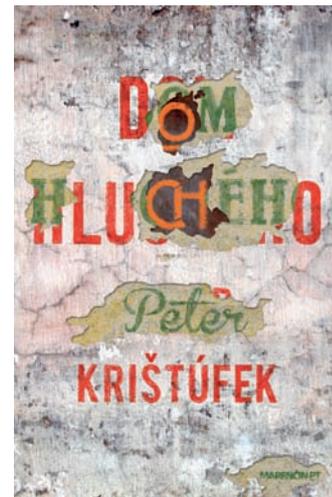
Were you in Bystrica on 29th August? Answer: Of course, from early in the morning! / Where is Bystrica actually?

Did you shout "Hurrah" on 25th February 1948 in some suitable square, let's say Stalin's? (Second possibility - You crazy?! In the flu season?!)

I'm sure that on 21st August 1968 you were without doubt standing in front of a tank with a terrifying barrel pointing at your bared chest (Or - in the opposite case - you were welcoming friendly troops with a bunch of red carnations, which from a distance of space and time could look as if you were standing in front of a tank with a terrifying barrel pointing at your bared chest.)

Translated by **Heather Trebatická**

This book *THE HOUSE OF THE DEAF MAN* was published by PT Marenčin, Bratislava, 2012



PETER KRIŠŤÚFEK (1973)

prose writer, poet, scriptwriter and filmmaker. He is author of three collections of short stories, *An Inaccurate Place* (*Nepresné miesto*, 2002), *In Plain Sight* (*Volným okom*, 2004) and *The Star of the Edited Take* (*Hviezda vystrihnutého záberu* 2005), one collection of poems, *75W* (2011) and three novels. His novel *The Prompter* (*Šepkár*, 2008), an absurdist parody of social mores, featuring dynamic narratives alternating in the manner of a drama or action movie, was nominated for the EU Prix du livre Européen and for the Anasoft Litera Prize 2008. An extract from the novel was included in the *Best European Fiction 2010*, an anthology of European writing by Dalkey Archive Press. Its Russian translation is under way. His second



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novel, *Gemini and Antipodeans* (*Blíženci a protinožci*, 2010) displays an original poetic vision, combined with elements of mystery and collage, and it was short-listed

for the Anasoft Litera Prize 2010. A Bulgarian translation is under way. His latest novel, *House of the Deaf Man* (*Dom hluchého*, 2012), brings the reader the turbulent history of 20th century Slovakia through the narration of a father and son. What makes Krišťúfek's fiction particularly attractive is his cinematographic approach and a strong ethical underpinning of his stories. His short stories have been published regularly in magazines and newspapers. As a filmmaker, Krišťúfek has shot over 20 TV documentaries, a full-length TV film, *The long short Night* (*Dlhá krátka noc*) and a full-length feature drama, *The Visible World* (*Viditeľný svet*). He has received several prestigious award for his film direction.

Jana Beňová

WEG! WEG!

(Leseprobe)

Der kleine Junge, er heißt Son – wie es als Nachsilbe nordischer Nachnamen gebräuchlich ist – mag weder fremde Haushalte noch größere Gesellschaften. Und am meisten graut es ihn vor größeren Gesellschaften in fremden Haushalten. Er bleibt auf der Türschwelle stehen, kehrt sofort um, entwischt durch die Beine seiner Eltern.

“Weg, weg!” drückt er deren Knie auseinander.

Rosa ist ein Kind des Hauptbahnhofs. Direkt hinter dem Zaun des Hauses, in dem sie geboren wurde, beginnt die chinesische Mauer der Eisenbahn. Die Bahnschwellen pulsieren, die Gleise galoppieren davon. Regelmäßige Aufpralle. Alle Betten in den Schlafwagen zeigen gen Norden.

Wie einmal ein Prager Adliger über seine kleine Schwester schrieb. Als Kinder waren sie zur Erziehung in einem deutschen Pensionat gewesen und hatten die Fürstin von Thurn und Taxis besucht. Als diese sie fragte, was sie sich wünschten, hatte seine kleine Schwester gesagt, dass sie es gerne aussprechen würde, doch es sei unartig. Sehr unschön. Es beginne mit W.

Die Fürstin drängte.

Das Mädchen: Weg! Weg!

Rosa, das Kind vom Hauptbahnhof, ist vierzig Jahre alt. All die Zeit, auf dem Weg zur Schule und dann zur Arbeit, hat sie tagtäglich die Gleisanlage überquert. Auf dem Weg zu den Stadtbussen kommt sie an den Zügen vorbei. Alle Arten des Verkehrs und der städtischen Verkehrswege beginnen hinter dem Tunnel. Die Züge stehen an den Bahnsteigen gleich hinter dem Haus. Man muss nur losrennen: uuuuuund / aufspringen.

Die Städte der Masken wechseln. Sie wie Masken wechseln.

Sich die Entfernungen aussuchen, die Orte der Erreichbarkeit.

Die Wege und die Kneipen.

Rosa: Im Stadtzentrum gibt es ein Display, auf dem blinken das Datum, die Uhrzeit und die aktuelle Temperatur. Darunter stehend verkürzt sich mir unauffällig mein Leben. Es läuft davon. Es ist eine Warnuhr: der Zeitmesser vergeudeter Tage, Monate, Grade Celsius.

Die Grundlage des schöpferischen Lebens ist das Schwänzen. Ein Abenteuer. Rosa erinnert sich, dass ihr als Kind das Schuleschwänzen völlig unverständlich erschien. Sie ging gern in die Schule, die war ihr erster Schauplatz, dort hatte sie Freunde. Sie hing an den Lehrerinnen.

*Weg, Weg! Durch leeres,
nichtssagendes Gelände ohne
Natur, ohne Menschen, ohne
Architektur.*

Die Grundschule war in der Stadt, das Gymnasium an der Peripherie – am Stadtrand, in einem deprimierenden Viertel mit großen breiten Verkehrsadern, wo man als Fußgänger nie wusste, wie man auf die andere Straßenseite gelangen sollte. Etwas für Maschinen und Autos, Autobusse, schwarzer Schnee und Staub, eine schnelle Fahrt ohne Hindernisse und Fußgänger. Ohne wirkliches Leben. Nur durchrasen. Wind. Weg, Weg! Durch leeres, nichtssagendes Gelände ohne Natur, ohne Menschen, ohne Architektur. Hier waren auch die Mitschüler ganz anders. Während in die Grundschule vor allem Kinder aus der Stadt gingen, war es auf dem Gymnasium die reine Provinz.

Die Provinz und Lapa. Das schlimmste Stadtviertel.

Die Provinzkinder sahen keinen Unterschied zwischen sich selbst und den Erwachsenen. Als Rosa das Abitur machte, hielt es ihre Mitschülerin, die heute Kriminalbeamtin ist, für ihren größten Triumph, auf dem Schulgelände zu rauchen, wenn dort die Lehrerin herumließ. Das reizte Rosa gar nicht. Am liebsten rauchte sie abends beim Schlendern durch die leere Stadt. (Fräulein, rauchen Sie doch nicht beim Herummarschieren, auf der Straße, wie irgendeine Ungarin, zünden Sie sich doch lieber schön eine drinnen im Sitzen an, beim Kaffee, sprach sie einmal ein alter Herr auf der Straße an.) Die Lehrer waren im gleichen Alter wie Rosas Eltern, so ordnete sie diese der gleichen Schicht zu – den Ausgestoßenen. Schon allein deswegen, weil sie erwachsen waren. Das war für die zu viel. Sie brauchten Respekt. Schutz.

Die ersten Tage am Gymnasium weinte sie oft. Es überkam sie vor allem im Speiseraum. Seit ihrer Kindheit konnte sie kollektives Essen nicht ausstehen. Die Räume, die Geräusche und die Gerüche im Speiseraum deprimierten sie. Dass man auch nach Unterrichtsende selbst im mit dem Essen verbundenen Privatbereich noch im Schülerkollektiv, von Lehrern angetrieben, vorgeschriebenes Essen in vorgeschriebener Menge verzehren musste. Dass selbst nach Unterrichtsende die Überwachung und Disziplin noch nicht zu Ende waren. Beim Essen sehnte sie sich danach, ein freier Mensch zu sein, *auf Augenhöhe* – kein Schüler. Sie wollte ein Teil der *großen Welt* sein, nicht des Kollektivs.

Rosa: Hier irgendwo begann meine Sehnsucht nach Unabhängigkeit, nach der Abgrenzung meiner selbst: Statt zur Schulspeisung ging ich als Kind ins Kaufhaus Prior, kaufte russische Eier & Coca-Cola. (Freiheit & Anarchie!) Es gab dort einen kleinen Selbstbedienungsbereich, gleich neben der Spielwarenabteilung. Dort waren alle Essenden unabhängig und erwachsen. Freiheit & Gleichheit & Brüderlichkeit.

Das Schwänzen begann im zweiten Jahr am Gymnasium. Im Jahre Neunzehnhundertneunzig. (Falls Sie wissen, wovon ich rede!) Nachdem sie Son getroffen hatte. Sie saßen jeden Abend im Café und erzählten. Sie lachten und sie waren traurig. Sie begann zu rauchen. Höchste Zeit – sechzehn Jahre alt!

Rosa: Rotwein liebte ich schon eine gewisse Zeit. Nach solchen Abenden konnte man morgens nicht ins Gymnasium gehen. Man *konnte nicht* in den Bus steigen und Richtung Peripherie rasen. Die *Stadt & sich selbst* verlassen. Ich erinnere mich, wie ich abends am Bahnhof drei Stückchen Gebäck kaufte, einen Becher Glühwein dazu,

meinen Walkman einschaltete und langsam, damit mir der Becher nicht auskippte, Richtung Stadt lief. Die Flüssigkeitsoberfläche im Becher, Atem und Schritt aufeinander abgestimmt. Die Allee beim Hauptbahnhof, die Baumkronen verflochten sich über meinem Kopf, der Zigarettenrauch, der Nelkenduft – kurz gesagt, Paris.

Und morgens packte ich meine Tasche und ging zur gleichen Zeit aus dem Haus wie immer. Weg! Weg! Ich dachte daran, als ich als Kind krank war und allein zu Hause blieb, dass ich vom Haus selbst überrascht war. Es war auf einmal ganz anders – ohne meinen Bruder und meine Eltern in den Zimmern, geheimnisvoll und gespenstisch – es stand ganz mir zur Verfügung.

Übersetzt von **Andrea Reynolds**

Das Buch *Weg! Weg!* (Preč! Preč!) erschien im Verlag Marenčin PT, Bratislava, 2012.



JANA BEŇOVÁ (1974)

Dichterin, Prosaautorin, Publizistin, studierte Theaterdramaturgie an der Hochschule für Musische Künste (VŠMU) in Bratislava. Sie publizierte drei Lyrikbände: *Lichtscheu* (Svetloplachý, 1993), *Lunaschritt* (Lonochod) und *Nacktliebevoll* (Nehota), beide in 1997). Das Buch *Parker*, ein Liebesroman, erschien 2001 sowie 2008 in deutscher Übersetzung im Leipziger Verlag Erata. Die Erzählensammlung *Zwölf Erzählungen und Ján Med* (Dvanásť poviedok a Ján Med) wurde 2003 herausgegeben. 2008 erschien auch Beňovás Roman *Plan der Begleitung* (Café Hyäne) -- *Plán odprevádzania* (Café Hyena). Dieser Roman wurde im Frühjahr 2012 in zweiter Auflage,



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mit umgekehrtem Titel -- *Café Hyäne* (Geleitplan) – herausgegeben. In 2012 erschien auch der bislang letzter Roman der Autorin *Weg! Weg!*

(*Preč! Preč!*). Eine Auswahl ihrer publizistischen Texte erschien unter dem Titel *Jana Beňová Heute* (Jana Beňová dnes).

Bis August 2012 war sie als Redakteurin beim Theaterinstitut Bratislava (Divadelný ústav) angestellt, gegenwärtig ist sie freiberuflich tätig. 1997 erhielt sie ein dreimonatiges Stipendium in Lissabon (Calouste Gulbenkian Stiftung), außerdem Schriftstellerstipendien in Krems (2006) und Wien (Milo Dor, 2011) sowie 2012 einen künstlerischen Aufenthalt im Rahmen des renommierten International Writing Program in Iowa, USA. Ihr Buch *Plán odprevádzania* (Café Hyena) wurde 2012 mit dem Preis der Europäischen Union für Literatur ausgezeichnet.

Mária Ferenčuhová

THE PRINCIPLE OF UNCERTAINTY

BrightCities

I.

The summer is not going, it stays like inflammation on stuffy roads,
warm stone, no trace of steps (and yet humidity in the air);
wounds are not healing, the same movement every afternoon – to
wipe the dust from one's eyes and the oil from hot wheels. October.

Not even return: continuance in crevices – the city doesn't remember,
nor do you wish to: numb footsoles, chapped hands, why not admit –
a strait, a passage, from behind the corner surfacing instead of
(another) memory, a street. Another one. Identical.

And a madman on the platform, quite desolate (no one is scared of him any more), change at Réaumur-Sébastopol:
on the very top a man is sleeping in his socks, a bandage sticking out of one, but hardly anyone dares cover his nose.

Behind the window without blinds someone gets drunk,
quite solitary, behind a window with a blind I change my, make-up,
I don't air the place, I silently invoke the téléphone, till finally I fall asleep.

II.

A finger code, noise, secret entrances, to be angry with oneself
for being (in the first moment) unrestrained, for being (in the second)
reasonable, and resent one's loneliness – where's the virtue in that?
From the point of view of eternity, it doesn't matter whether in this
world, side by side with this body (or some other), from the
momentary point of view: to choose emptiness. And

wait.

An old woman, in fact rather mouldered than old, perhaps senile
and possibly bewildered for âges past, takes the lift up and down,
greeted at great length, aloud, repeats «yes», «yes» over and over again,
addresses everyone as “m ad a m” “sir” with an assiduous smile,
and touches children's cheeks with her fingers.

A pin in someone's stomach, a word in someone's heart:
quarantine, forty days of silence.
Aflame, cellophane, a scorched image,
you infect the whole colony with yourself, and you're surprised
when they condemn you.

III.

There are wooden houses, plastered or just stuck together with cloth,
carpets instead of walls, cables in the corners, dust in the joints
and the wind under the door.
A jug kettle, a microwave oven, a hot plate,

someone who sleeps,
not moving. He who follows meanders, not aware of the riverbanks
bare of green, indiffèrent to the pavement: who continues on
to where people ride camels
with knapsack on back,
where grey blocks of flats stand in the sand like a suburb,
only they are burning,
with tents below the Windows,
a waterless fountain and the sky in fiâmes,
you want to go back to the river, there's no way,
– not in the dream, and therefore not at all –
you need only to open your eyes, run along the walls,
burning carpets, acrid smoke,
barefoot and apronless:
those stairs
are still there.

An Endangered Species

Photographs

1

A landscape – a map.
Houses scattered around
or quite washed away,
remnants of squares,
intersections with a perfect surface,
carefully drawn lanes,
black-white,
not a trace of blood,
an abandoned building site,
only the road is absorbed in mud
or mud licks up the road.

A little boy has lost interest,
dribbling the ball on another
playground.

Thousands of springlets, streams,
feeders
run on the rocks, gathering mass,
advancing, roaring,
and if you stumble,
first they go round you like a
pebble,
one actually halts or holds up the
stream,
others leap over, drag,
pass across,
trample down –

a bit further, downwards at a slant,
in the red heat

a single drop slides through a pipe,
falls on a stone, rebounds, sizzles,
the other ones evaporate on the
way –

a rough and
dry little
tongue licks
my hand:
more.

6

A landscape – a
postcard. Containers,
boxes,
the noses of houses dug into the
soil.
In the giant cracks of pavements
only boards, papers and bricks
face the invasion of gatherers.
On a vacant expanse two trees
remained.
Heavenly peace
– or almost heavenly –
on a cathedral without towers,
ruins standing on end like hairs.

We are watchmakers.
Me and my little son.
He has two alarm docks. He says:
I want these two alarm docks
to be next to each other.
This one will be Nextto

and this one Each other.

To create the world from
words. From nothing:

8

Clenched jaws, tight lips
– words come anyway,
issue, flow,
and though the images sometimes
break in upon
speech,

in the end words rise from the
stream again.
I have joints, move my fingers,
articulate,
discover, grip:
an axe for the essence,
either exactitude – or silence.

Translated by **Marián Andričík**
This Book was published by Ars
Poetica, Bratislava, 2012.



MÁRIA FERENČUHOVÁ (1975), poet. She studied film screenwriting and dramaturgy and did a postgraduate degree in the history and theory of films at the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (VŠMU) in Bratislava, and Sciences du Langage at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences sociales in Paris. She has published prose, poetry and literary translations in the periodicals *Fragment*, *Park*, *Host*, *Romboid*, *Vlna* as well as in the collection from the *Ars poetica* (2003) festival, and other publications. Her poetry has been translated into English. At present she lectures in the history of the world film industry at the Film and



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Television Faculty of the Academy VŠMU. She is editor of *KINO-IKON*, a journal dealing with film theory.

She publishes professional articles and studies in the journals *KINO-IKON*, *OS*, *História*, *Romboid*, *Tvorba T*, *Slovenské divadlo*, *Človek a spoločnosť*, in the collection *Priestor vo filme* (2000), and others. Her work appears regularly in the Czech journals *Cinepur* and *Iluminace*, which focus on film studies. She translates from French (P. Virilio, A. Nothomb and others). She lives in Bratislava. Her first collections of poems are *Hidden Subtitles* (*Skryté titulky*, 2003), *The Principle of Uncertainty* (*Princíp neistoty* 2008), *Vain Little Bubbles* (*Mámnivé bublinky*, 2010); her latest work is *Endangered Species* (*Ohrozený druh*, 2012).

Michal Hvorecký

NAUM

Love and Death at Christmas

Snowed-over, the road disappeared before me. The GPS declared that the region I was entering did not exist. What if I'd blundered into Poland? I was running late, and the last village the satellite recognised lay twenty kilometres back and was called after a certain deciduous tree. It was one of the Slovak words that I'd mastered, because for some incomprehensible reason my learner's textbook had it in almost every lesson.

What was I looking for in the north of Orava? There had to be something basically defective in my life if I was preparing to spend Christmas at a place that wasn't on the map. In the festive season you're supposed to relax, but I was in such stress that my heart was thumping and sweat was steaming on my forehead. I'd already been travelling for six hours, having despaired of finding any other transport in a country that plainly had more cars than people. What if the engine happened to break down now? I grabbed the steering wheel more tightly, so that my hands wouldn't shake.

All I'd experienced during ten months in the country passed through my head in a flash. I had come to teach French literature at a university which by no means deserved that exalted name. In this eccentric land universities sprang up where there weren't even secondary schools.

The students read nothing and downloaded the contents of books from the web. Most of them thought Madame Bovary was an American film, Sartre a brand of rank cheese, and Deleuze some crooner on TV. They "wrote" their seminar works by the copy & paste method, from pages full of wretched secondary students' essays. But how could I reproach my students for their duplications when the institution's only qualified "dozent" had coolly copied his entire thesis from Czech? This was a place where scholarly research was equated almost with a Xerox service.

Just before the exams started the department heads informed me that I must not fail anyone, because this would mean grant money lost. The professional guarantor of the French department was a lady professor who spoke a kind of French that I couldn't make head or tail of. At the beginning of the semester

the young pro-rector set a task for the fourth years to research political motifs in Balzac; a few months later he collected their findings; and a year after that his new book on this theme was published.

Sophisticated methods were used only for the illegal collection of school moneys. I too forced upon my students dubious donor contracts, cheques for garage PLCs and invoices to the accounts of fictitious NGOs. The regular employees never saw a cent of the money acquired, while the bosses enjoyed not a few Pacific holidays. An even better source of income for the bosses was the awarding of honorary degrees to politicians, whom I never got to know except at these investitures.

It was enough for me to see the building at a distance, and I'd feel a frightful emptiness. As Christmas approached, the situation got worse. They stuffed so much brushwood into my staffroom that I didn't even have a place to sit. Had the teachers brought the same verve to scholarship as they did to tinsel decorations and carol-singing, I'd long ago have been teaching at Slovakia's École normale supérieure.

The breaking-point came on the day when my superiors informed me that to increase the volume of work published abroad they were founding a publishing house in the Ukraine and would issue their own "scholarly" books there. At a meeting of their so-called academic council I announced I was leaving in protest.

In my own mind, however, I was not so sure, because that would mean losing the Paris grant, and above all – where would I go back to? My home in La Défense hadn't been my home since the summer, just as my wife Denise hadn't been my wife. But despite that, what I wanted was to return immediately.

But then I met her. Stasia wasn't my student, she was in the lower year. I had never in my life seen such a beautiful young woman, actually still a girl. She had deep blue eyes, almost translucent skin, broad lips, pointed chin, and blond hair. Her receding cheekbones perfectly matched my idea of Slavic beauty. During consultation hours she came to ask if she could visit my optional seminar on contemporary French poetry and prose. (She didn't realise that they'd cancelled it because no one had signed on...) She wanted to know if I'd discussed Érik Orsenna yet and asked me to recommend her titles from Duras. I didn't believe my own ears.

We started talking and we couldn't stop. Stasia loved to read Camus in the original, and not only Albert but

"In the coming year I would only make love and die."

also my own favourite Renaud, author of the scandalous *French Expedition*. She spoke practically without an accent, having spent one secondary year in Marseille. I couldn't tear my eyes away from her. A torrent of thoughts and plans flooded upon me. I'd have liked to invite her to a cafe, but in that high-rise dump there was no such thing, just numberless pubs. Besides, there was a clause in my contract that strictly forbade me to start affairs with my students. Anything like that carried the risk of dismissal.

It occurred to me that together we might bring some life into this sink-hole. She accepted my plan, gave some good tips, and did most of the work. In June we organised a lecture by the young Bratislava film-maker Ernest Polto, and in November we had a guest appearance of the Astorka theatre group with their much-discussed play *Elizabeth the Second*. During the performance I learned the word "nenávidím", *I hate*, which Bernhardt's Austrian hero had repeated a good thousand times during the two-hour performance. But there was something else that was much more important. That night after the play Stasia gave me a French kiss the like of which I had never experienced in France.

When she invited me to spend Christmas with her parents in their little village in Orava, I didn't reveal my

"Still in pyjamas, I received a glass of home-made cherry brandy, and immediately one more for the other wing. I would say that the French are a nation of alcoholics, but what could you call this? Immediately I put on my shoes, because on that day, from respect, one must not step barefoot on the ground. I did not have much breakfast, as they directed me to fast, but alcohol was not counted, so they kept on pouring me refills."

joy, so as not to scare her away. Online I bought her the new Houellebecq and a fine edition of the *Mandarins* and, just to keep in step with the times, an electronic reader.

At last I made out the two-word name of the village on a road sign. I braked, and the tyres skidded on the uncleared road. Following my instructions, I stopped at the end of the village. I didn't see much, because the lamps gave light sparingly, but it looked a bit like an open-air museum. I advanced into the perfect silence of the night. In front of her house I could see Stasia, and everything else ceased to matter.

I took my baggage out of the boot, we embraced briefly, and I went into the wooden building. Though dead-tired, I managed the introduction to parents – a ritual with new girlfriends that had always terrified me – more easily than usual. The stocky father was heating caramel oil, alcohol and ham strips on the range, evidently a popular winter mixture for lubricating agricultural machines. But no, he poured tots of the yellowish liquid into little glasses and offered me one.

MICHAL HVORECKÝ (1976),

prose writer, and publicist. He studied aesthetics at the University of Constantine in Nitra. He spent several years on research stays in United States (Iowa City University) and in Western and Central European countries (Belgium, Germany, Austria, Hungary). His debut collection of short stories *Gatherers & Hunters* (Lovci & zberači) was published in 2001. Hvorecký has also written novels *Plush* (Plyš, 2005), *Eskorta* (2007) and *Danube in America* (Dunaj v Amerike, 2010). His latest book *Naum* (2012) is again a collection of eleven different short stories focused on the central theme of the contemporary life in Bratislava and Central Europe more generally.



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Many of his works are regularly translated into German, Italian, Polish

or Czech. A dramatic adaptation of his novel *Plush* was performed at the *Aréna* theatre in Bratislava, the *Na zábradlí* theatre in Prague and the *Schauspielhaus* theatre in Hannover. He also attracts a general audience with his social and civic engagement. He publishes regularly in newspapers, journals and the social media. A volume of collected publicist writings was published with the title *Pastoral letter* (Pastiersky list, 2008). An extract of his work is included in the recent anthology of contemporary Slovak prose, *5 x 5* (2011). Hvorecký has received several accolades and prizes for his short stories and novels.

I had a sniff of the scalding glass. Hriatô, Central Europe's illicit answer to absinthe. It shook me, and I felt a mild nausea. So as not to insult the hospitable gentleman, I tossed it down. After the second glass my pupils expanded; after a third I was hallucinating.

I made the acquaintance of ten of Stasia's relatives and carefully learned their names. Though the night was well advanced, Mama offered me thick lentil soup with a wooden spoon. All the time I was hoping they'd allot me to Stasia's bed, but they fixed me a nook in a corner of the elongated house. Though disappointed with the solitude, I slept like a trooper.

I was woken very early by knocking. I was glad that Stasia had come, but first her father burst in and only then – clad in costume! – his daughter. She patiently translated everything for me and interpreted my answers. On the day of Christ's Nativity, if the first person who came with greetings was a woman, that would bring bad luck. A man must be first to come in to the guest. At that moment I couldn't have imagined any custom more stupid.

Still in pyjamas, I received a glass of home-made cherry brandy, and immediately one more for the other wing. I would say that the French are a nation of alcoholics, but what could you call this? Immediately I put on my shoes, because on that day, from respect, one must not step barefoot on the ground. I did not have much breakfast, as they directed me to fast, but alcohol was not counted, so they kept on pouring me refills.

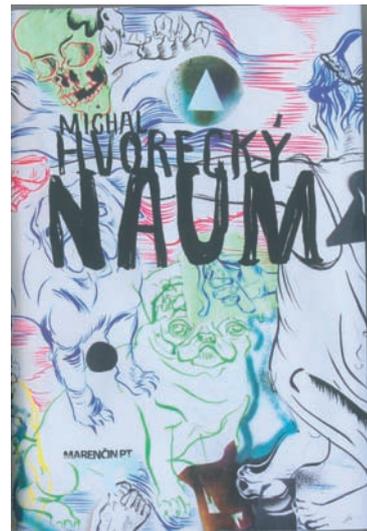
Spirits had no effect on the father. Under every tablecloth in the house he put money, so that poverty wouldn't get a grip on the family during the coming year. That seemed a good idea, so I imitated him, but alas, only with credit cards, because I had not brought

cash of any kind, as if purposely. There would be no change in my teacherly poverty.

At ten there was a trip to the graves of dead ancestors. The little wooden graveyard on a steep rise was strewn with wreaths and dried flowers. We lit candles and deposited them in red lanterns. Honey wine was drunk and some of it poured on the graves, so that the dead would not be thirsty. I gaped at this pagan Slavic ritual which would have delighted Claude Lévi-Strauss, but Stasia told me that the family was Catholic.

Translated by **John Minahane**

The book Naum was published by Marečín PT, Bratislava 2012.



Pavol Garan

POEMS

The Idealist at Night

I don't know about me, but my girl,
she must be a fairy.
She has to hover
twenty feet above earth,
all the while playing
the harp,
like
apricot flowers
raining down...

I repeat,
when, looking over my pipe,
or across the yawning sink,

I take my bearings
in the folding mirror
opposite –

between the tequila and gin,
between the pistachio nuts and the
brandy –

and turn on my heel,
there's nothing odd about me:

I too like to turn my head after
women,
just that afterwards I need
to resituate my hands:

the left one, the right...

I've always maintained
that pure loneliness isn't a state
but a quality,
from which one cannot part.

Naively, I still
keep leaving death
till the last moment.

And also I've never yet
seen an actual

harp.

Moment with a Knife

Behind the stooping pear-tree
by the house, this autumn too holds on
to its convictions.

 Holds on,
while the pilgrim birds from the north,
high up in flow, criss-cross
the leaves,
 while
in my cold room I,
over leaves of paper, still
with the sweet
point of a knife
expertly smooth my eyebrows,

and I've no one to whom I might surrender myself
completely,

O benevolent
God,

with that
knife.

 While
in the tense fruit
on the table, all
night and
indeed
movingly,

an insect
suffers.

Sorcery

Tired after work,
I lie on the bench.

The cat's been dozing
on my belly (happy

that she loves me,
I breathe more with the diaphragm.)

I'm testing –
whether I'll notice when the sensual

clamour dies away
after her leap, the awareness

that we're touching –
when I'll cease to know

whether she's still there
or has already gone.

Trick

Often in moments of weakness, when I shut my eyes,
he's there,
on a nearby hummock,
behind the blackthorn,
intent on his aim –

the medieval archer.

In the bustling street,
in the murmuring café,

no one will notice the gentle
rustle of feathers,
the ominous creaking of leather gear,
of wood under stress.

Only I will hunch involuntarily
over the table,
I'll cower behind a gaggle of friends
(forgive me),
I'll take cover
behind a tree.

Or I'll just squint
and gaze at him tensely

over bloody
shoulders.

Borderline

I close my eyes (they're poison-berry bright),
I'd rather not know who's embracing you.
Each dawn, I guess who gutted me last night.
I'm only my own shell, I'm hollowed through.

I grimace... And he twigs, whoever's been
sitting near me. And sits where he's not seen.

I'm everything, but all under duress:
I write, but there is no one to address.

What I Meant

I pass my rutting time with verse
(such fervour is a wonder!);
distinct existences traverse
me, echoing like thunder.

Conscious that matter mars me
(from living it's what bars me),

I take whatever's stirring.
The story. That's recurring.

Preparation for Winter

Oh, elderberry syrup! – who'd want more?
My sister's boiling it. I'll mix some for
the little fairy with the metallated teeth.
She'll smile and say: Syrupy water. – Sweet.

I'm worried, will we have enough for our reserves?
Quality of ingredients I check, to calm my nerves.
But Mama's looking at me with the fears
of Mamas ripe in years.

We've sacks of elderberries full – Mammy, don't fear!
The fairy's going to love me. She'll get the recipe.
I see it plain: we've got an elderberry smell.
Together we have something that words just cannot
tell.

Event

Last night the Red and Cola Lovers' Club
held session at The Two Apostles pub.
I took the window seat, and watched the sky
to see migrating fairgrounds passing by.

And yes indeed, when I had drained my glass,
blue rollercoasters overhead flew past.
The Balakryl flakes floating on that drink
were reminiscent of sardines, I think,

I'd swigged the lot, however, through the straw...
Or they were hot-air castles that I saw.
It'll be in the minutes of the Red and Cola Lovers'
Club,
at The Two Apostles pub.

Obligatory Doubts

Shouldn't I write, adopting female gender,
about the scents of jasmine from the parks,
and ponder what will happen after Nature,
over my Pexeso with palms and sharks?

I'd call the mayflies, forest bugs and ticks,
and cursing, summon up from long before
all I invested in my errors, which
I'd openly acknowledge and deplore.

Suddenly everything would be so true.
True harmony of things, true reign of mind.
And true authentic pose of someone who
seeks himself thus, forever hopes to find –

so he can mumble from profound green deeps,
as if henceforth he could unceasingly
continue going forwards by retreats
and gather only for time's majesty.

Translated by **John Minahane**

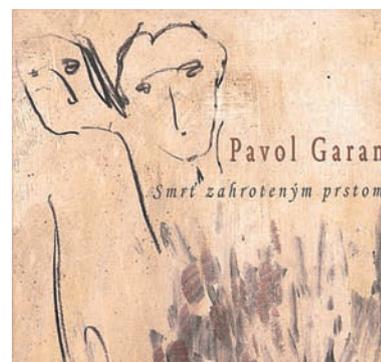
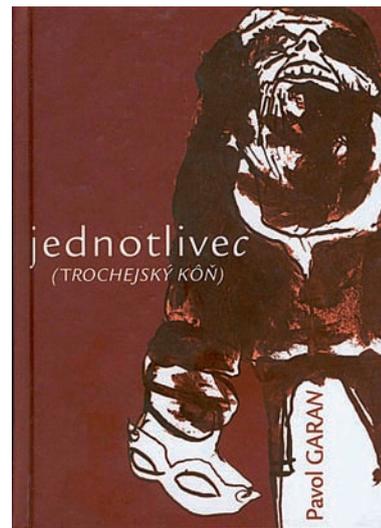
PAVOL GARAN (1978),

representative
of the younger
generation of
Slovak poets, was
born in Rožňava.
He grew up, lives
and writes in
Dobšiná. Garan has
been publishing
poems from 1999,
his writings have
appeared in various
Slovak and Czech
literary journals



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(Dotyky, Literárne kroky, RAK, Knižná revue, LET) and
broadcast on Slovak Radio. He has written books of
poetry, *Death with sharpened finger* (*Smrť zahroteným
prstom*, 2007) for which he received the accolade of
the Ivan Krasko Prize, and *Solitaire* (*Trochean horse*)
(2009). Some of his works have been published in
several anthologies, such as *Dlh* (Collective volume of
East Slovakian authors) in 2004 and *5x5* (Anthology
of contemporary Slovak poetry) in 2012. He has been
a member of the Spiš literary club since 2001.



Alexandra Salmela

27 ODER DER TOD MACHT DEN KÜNSTLER

Prolog

Nach drei Gläsern Rotwein zurückzukehren, das war ziemlich amüsant. Der Mann saß bereits am Tisch, die Beine übereinandergeschlagen, er hatte sich lässig im Stuhl zurückgelehnt. Mit dem freien Bein wippte er, um unauffällig dessen elegante Form in einem neuen italienischen Halbschuh bewundern zu können. Mit den Fingern trommelte er auf den Rücken eines dicken Buches.

„Dies ist ein wunderbares, ein fantastisches Buch“, sagte er. „Ein bahnbrechendes Werk der finnischen Literatur, damit beginnt ein völlig neues Kapitel ihrer Geschichte. Weder vor diesem Autor noch nach ihm hat es jemand geschafft – war jemand fähig – in solchem Stil zu schreiben. In die Hände des Lesers gelangt eine in unglaublich ausgefeilter Sprache geschriebene, fast neunhundert Seiten umfassende Schilderung der sich binnen lediglich sechs Stunden zutragenden Geschehnisse um den Bau eines Schiffes in der Gemeinschaft einer kleinen Fischersiedlung am Schärenmeer. Obwohl der Stil des Autors außerordentlich modern ist – ich habe schon auf die bahnbrechende Bedeutung des

Buches verwiesen – so verwendet er doch alte Kalevala Motive, das Motiv, welches ich gerade im Sinn habe, ist eines der schönsten, die im Kalevala zu finden sind ... Fällt irgendjemandem ein, um welches Motiv es vielleicht geht? – Ich kann Ihnen dabei soweit helfen, indem ich verrate, dass es sich um einen Vergleich handelt ...“

Im Hörsaal herrschte absolute Stille. Die Aufmerksamkeit des Mannes wanderte von seinen Schuhen hin zu seinen langen, sorgfältig gepflegten Fingern. Er hörte auf, damit herumzuklopfen und konzentrierte sich auf die Untersuchung des Fingernagels seines Mittelfingers.

„Womit könnte man den Stapellauf eines Schiffes oder besser gesagt, eines neuen kühnen Seegelbootes, vergleichen, doch nur mit ...“

„... mit einer Kantele?“ fragte eine beflissene Studentin.

Der Mann machte sich nicht einmal die Mühe, solch einem Staubkörnchen auch nur einen Blick zuzuwerfen, er pustete den nicht vorhandenen Dreck vom Fingernagel und seufzte.

„Aber selbstverständlich mit einem Schwan. Stellen

ALEXANDRA SALMELA (1980), studierte Dramaturgie an der Hochschule für musische Künste (VŠMU) in Bratislava sowie Finnisch an der Karlsuniversität in Prag. 2009 erschien ihre Novelle mit dem Titel *Der wirkliche Immigrantenblues*, mit der sie am Wettbewerb für Immigrantensliteratur in Finnland teilnahm und den 2. Preis verliehen bekam. In einem finnischen Literaturwettbewerb erhielt sie einen der renommiertesten Literaturpreise Finnlands – den Preis der Tageszeitung Helsingin Sanomat für das beste Debüt. Ihr Buch heißt *27 oder der Tod macht den Künstler* (27 čiže smrt robí umelca). 27 Jahre ist für eine der Hauptfiguren die schicksalhaft magische Grenze, an der der Tod lauert und mit ihm der Ruhm und eigentlich die Unsterblichkeit. Wenigstens angesichts der Tatsache, dass viele Rockstars in diesem Alter



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aus dem Leben schieden. Mit deren Aufzählung beginnt das Buch und dies deutet an, dass es sich nicht um einen traditionellen Roman handelt – weder in Inhalt noch Form. Es ist gewissermaßen die „Odyssee“ einer

jungen Frau, die sich selbst sucht. Zwei Handlungslinien überschneiden sich: die 27 Jahre alte künstlerisch veranlagte Angie möchte berühmt werden und etwas Großes im Leben erreichen, noch bevor sie 28 Jahre alt wird, nach dem Vorbild ihrer Idole Kurt Cobain, Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin und Jimi Hendrix. Die zweite Handlungslinie spielt sich in einer kleinen Siedlung in den finnischen Wäldern ab, wo eine Familie mit ihren Kindern lebt. Die Erzähler sind hier eine Katze, ein Spielzeugschweinchen und ein alter Opel Astra. Die Art des Erzählens dieses Romans und der humorvolle Stil der Autorin sind geprägt von Leichtigkeit. Dieses Buch hat Salmela zunächst auf Finnisch geschrieben. Es erschien dann in slowakischer Übersetzung sowie auch auf Tschechisch, Dänisch und Polnisch, weitere Übersetzungen sind geplant.

Sie sich die Eleganz vor, mit welcher dieser romantische Vogel aufs Wasser aufsetzt, wie er den langen schlanken Hals streckt wie – “

„– eine Giraffe,“ bemerkte jemand keck.

„Wie bitte?“ fuhr der Mann zusammen.

„Nichts, Herr Dozent Krup,“ sagte jemand anderes mit ernster Miene.

„Ach“, beruhigte sich der Mann. „Es schien mir, als ob ich Giraffe gehört hätte.“

Sorgfältig prüfte er den Zustand seiner Nägel an allen zehn Fingern, blinzelte zu den Schuhen hin und fuhr fort:

„Der Stapellauf eines Schiffes wird also verglichen mit einem Schwan, der auf der Wasseroberfläche eines Sees aufsetzt, der aufrechte Mastbaum ragt wie der Schwanenhals ... - “

„... einer Giraffe“, kicherte irgendein Komiker.

„Wie bitte?“ fragte der Mann.

„Nichts“, sagte jemand anderes, sich bemügend, seine ernste Miene zu bewahren.

„Einer Giraffe“, wiederholte es noch einmal jemand, das Wort und die dadurch inspirierte Vorstellung auskostend.

„Habe ich jetzt wirklich Giraffe gehört?“ der Mann sprach nun mit deutlich höherer Stimme.

„Aber ganz bestimmt nicht“, sagte irgendetwas, die Worte träge langziehend.

Die Vorstellung der Giraffe, die aufs Wasser aufsetzt, hatte sich inzwischen aber schon in den Gedanken aller festgesetzt, der kollektive Held konnte das Kichern nun nicht mehr zurückhalten und brach in ein befreiendes Gelächter aus.

„Hören Sie“, ging der Mann zum Angriff über. „Haben Sie jemals gesehen, wie ein Schwan aufs Wasser aufsetzt? Das ist in der Tat die verkörperte Eleganz, eine unvergleichbare Schönheit! Ach, diese verlangsamten Bewegungen, der Bogen seines langen Halses, der sich gerade streckt, wenn der Schwan wie eine weiße Wolke aufs Wasser aufsetzt – „

„Er fällt runter wie ein Stein“, sagte irgendein zynischer Amateurornithologe. „Platsch!“

Der kollektive Held stellte sich vor, wie ein fetter Vogel auf die Wasseroberfläche aufschlug, lebhaft vernahm er den komischen Laut, das Platschen, er spürte, wie ihm die Wassertropfen auf die nackte Haut spritzten und wie die Luft um ihn herum vibrierte wie unter einer Druckwelle, hervorgerufen durch eine riesige lebendige Masse. Und zu all dem hatte dieser Vogel einen Girafenhals. Der kollektive Held wieherte laut los.

„Was denn, haben Sie noch nie einen Schwan gesehen?“ rief der Mann.

Jemand schlug seinen Kopf auf den Tisch, ein anderer

rutschte beinahe darunter.

„Der Schwan ist der schönste aller Vögel! Das Kalevala Symbol, der Schwan von Tuonela, der finnische Nationalvogel! Klickt es bei Ihnen immer noch nicht?“ rief der Mann aufgebracht.

Auf seine hoffnungslos drängenden Fragen antwortete jedoch niemand, der kollektive Held war im Wirbel quietschvergnügten Taumels gefangen.

„Sie Gipfel der Ignoranz! Unkultivierte Idiotenbande! Ich schlepe Sie alle nach Finnland, an den Ohren ziehe ich Sie zur malerischen finnischen Seenlandschaft, ich werde Sie in einem Sommerhäuschen einschließen und Sie dazu zwingen, den ganzen Sommer lang sich auf dem Wasser niederlas-

sende Schwäne zu beobachten. Ich lasse Sie von dort nicht weg, Sie können nichts anderes tun, nicht essen, trinken, schlafen, bis Sie nicht eingestehen, dass der Schwan der schönste aller Vögel ist, der weißeste aller Vögel, der wolkenhafteste aller Vögel!“ tobte der Mann und über sein gebräuntes Gesicht rann der Schweiß.

Der kollektive Held amüsierte sich immer noch, doch das unkontrollierte Gelächter verstummte langsam. Der Witz war geboren, hatte seine wilde Zeit durchlebt und ebte auf natürliche Weise ab.

„Haben Sie in Finnland ein Sommerhäuschen?“ fragte interessiert eine gewisse Person, und es lohnt sich, ihr besondere Aufmerksamkeit zu schenken, da gerade sie zur Hauptheldin dieses Opus wird, und sie wunderte sich gleich selbst über ihre Frage.

„Nein“, sagte der Mann, sich die tropfenfeuchte Stirn abwischend. „Ich habe dort mein Erbe. – Das Haus meiner Familie“, fügte er stolz hinzu und trocknete sich mit einem schneeweißen Taschentuch die verschwitzten Hände.

Angie: 27

Ich bin heute siebenundzwanzig Jahre alt geworden.

Aus oben aufgeführtem Anlass habe ich folgende Liste erstellt:

Kurt Cobain 27 Jahre, 1 Monat und 16 Tage

Brian Jones 27 Jahre, 4 Monate und 5 Tage

Jim Morrison 27 Jahre, 6 Monate und 25 Tage

Janis Joplin 27 Jahre, 9 Monate und 15 Tage

Jimi Hendrix 27 Jahre, 9 Monate und 21 Tage

Ich habe ein Jahr Zeit, berühmt zu werden, an Alkohol, Drogen, einer tödlichen Krankheit, einem schrecklichen Unfall, an Selbstmord oder Mord zu sterben und dann ewig in den Herzen der hingebungsvollen Bewunderer weiterzuleben.

Ferkelino:

Meine Familie

27 ist ein mystischer Meilenstein, von dem aus wirkliche Künstler ins Unbekannte hinaus schreiten und im Universum der Legenden verschwinden, ihre mittelmäßigen Pilgergenossen und trauernden Angehörigen hinter sich zurücklassend.

Hällöchen und grüßt euch, Freunde. Ich heiße Ferkelino. Gestattet mir, dass ich mich vorstelle.

Ich bin klein, weich und bunt und wohne in einem kleinen roten Haus mit meiner besten Freundin Pustebäumchen und ihrer Familie. Ich habe so große Augen und spitze Ohren, dass einige Erwachsene denken, ich sei eine Kuh. Andere Erwachsene wiederum verwechseln mich mit einem Bären, obwohl ich wirklich und hundertprozentig ein Schweinchen bin. Zum Glück erkennen mich die Kinder immer, und sie rufen:

„Ferkelino, komm und spiel mit uns!“

Ich spiele gern mit den Kindern. Ich bewege meine Beinchen, meine Öhrchen und mein Schnäuzchen, ich tanze meinen Schweinchantz und singe mein Schweinchenlied. Das geht so:

*Einen Schritt hierhin, einen Schritt dorthin
Fang mich bei den Beinchen*

*Rechts entlang und links entlang
Hab ein kleines Schnäuzchen
Ich stampfe und ich klatsche
Mit meinen Augen zwinker ich*

*Ich wirbel meinen Schwanz herum
Mit meinen Ohren wackel ich*

*Im Kreis herum, im Kreis herum
Das finden wir ganz lustig*

*Wir drehen uns und drehen uns
Schlafen, ach das wollen wir nicht*

Ťuhu!

Übersetzt von **Andrea Reynolds**

Das Buch *27 oder der Tod macht den Künstler* (27 čiže smrť robí umelca) erschien im Verlag Q111, Bratislava, 2011.



Dominik Tatarka

JOTTINGS FOR BELOVED LUTÉCIA

(Extract)

Yesterday—a sunny day, a gift from the gods, the grape harvest, like back then, I drank and I cursed, I poured out all of my rage—yesterday, yesterday, as you know, yesterday it was two years, two years back, since we met in Suché mýto, in the capital city of our captive/embraced Tatrania-Slovakland, since then I’ve been writing to you, I write these Jottings for the Beloved Lutécia, which I will never send you, which they will certainly later seize and scatter.

You don’t know, dear Lutécia—Leticia Parisiorum, Leticia to your Parisian friends, why I write you these jottings—for you, which I know in advance, that I’ll never send to you. Other than that, meanwhile, I write you letters, which I regularly send to you by air mail, that don’t fly from Prague, although, although they are innocent, at least from a political standpoint, as lilies. In the jottings

that I won’t send you, I injure you, I verbally claw at you as if you are a bird of prey, a forest buzzard, a sacerdotal czarist griffin, I explain in the letters, that also don’t fly to you, I’m grazing on you with the big gentle muzzle of an elk or a horse, I’m fumbling with the elk’s muzzle, I’m groping the rounded, endlessly gentle shapes of your body, of our soul, fumbling with the gentle elk’s muzzle all over you, from afar, inaccessible because of the invented borders, I the captive animal, captive and starving like you, I’m finding in myself, in the expanding eternal memory, my animal devotion before you with the mystery which in the grasp of pleasure and pain excreted me into the world of the cosmos like a blind ray and was licked all over, completely, like a fresh wet calf. I am embraced by the felicity and grace of the language of my mother and my lover, who give birth to me, throwing

me out of themselves, placate me, reconcile me with the cosmos, with their language, breath, words.

[. . .]

Once then, two years ago—by the way, I remind you, that the day of our meeting was not only the day of the grape harvest, but also the first day of the four-week election campaign; the walls and windows, from the ground to the sky, everything was plastered with red: I'm voting, we're voting, we're going to vote (manifestly) for the happy future of our children (human contentment for all time). That same day, a friend, a friend from Prague, as if he smelled the young wine, sent me a bunch of money, enough for two weeks' sustenance. It's not a mistake, don't send it back, I'm paying you back a debt, he added. The hell you're paying me back, you're splitting it with me. I got up right away in joy, two weeks' sustenance, which my wife doesn't know about. It also seemed a little funny to me, that I'm getting dressed up like this as if for a trip into the big wide world, although I only had to crawl down from my little hilltop into town, to buy tobacco in the nearest tobacconist, maybe also some juniper brandy from Trenčín and maybe I'll also drink two deciliters of stum standing up at the Šenkvice wine-bar. You know, the reflex of freedom, to put it in an elevated way. A need for movement. For ten years now I have been tied up to my doghouse, by the invisible but more strangling chains of administrative measures. When I got that small change from my friend in Prague, I spat on it superstitiously, may

it be fruitful and multiply, right away I felt like a world traveller. I put on, rather unsuitably, my old Swiss hiking trousers, my Yugoslav windbreaker, and hung the Polish linen bag, with which I had travelled quite a bit, over my shoulder. That was my subconscious self-stylization, which means, I'm taking on features so that people recognize me because of them. My soul can never have its fill of wandering. I guess I'm a nomad. My first published prose was significantly titled *Journeys*. I passionately wrote the book *Man on the Road* about my love of the countries of different nations, about dying on the road. The Catholic Existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel was touched, perhaps, that I wrote a travel book with the same name as he had, maybe also by my Catholic name, and offered me the great prize of Erasmus of Rotterdam, which he had received. May I travel, and live where my heart desires.

Yes, a man means well, but has an impact of destructive evil. The philosopher unwittingly called attention to the fact that I am a vagrant and certainly, according to my name, also Catholic. The main national apparatchik Agin ascertained all this and proposed to the Soulcrusher-Woodbreaker a punishment for me. We can break this vagrant like this: first, in the name of the higher interest, we will take away his passport; second, we'll tie him to his doghouse with the invisible chain of measures; third, we will let him be tormented by his wife, who should not have any suspicion of this—she will receive an international scholarship, she will receive a passport, she is promised a travel permit, if, if she coaxes one little engaged proclamation from him, that he agrees, that he sees, and saw, in the “entrance” the wise, even brilliant wisdom, of the leader.

Bartolomej Slzička (Bartholomew Teardrop), that is, myself, hasn't read the newspapers for years, and doesn't know that the whole city was plastered with red from night until morning. In front of the Štefánia café, at the nearest tobacco shop, he stops and stands, stares, in his soul he manifestly votes for a happy future for his children and for human contentment for all time, a figure like a scarecrow in a poppy field, unsuitably dressed in a warm Titoist windbreaker, bourgeois hiking trousers, with a Polish Catholic bag on his shoulder, with the money from his Prague friend in his pocket.

Slzička knows, he knows in advance: when he steps down from his little hilltop, it's all over. Someone always meets him, explains their case to him and it's all over, he won't be able to get to what he wanted to do that morning. For his contemporaries, he has become a coat-hanger on which, with admiration or love, they hang their own mistakes, their stupidity, their weakness. And it happened this time, too.

There on the busy intersection in front of the Štefánia café, on the first day of the intensifying election campaign, the Academician stops next to him. Slzička turns away from the window with at least three months of fresh illustrated news.

The Academician, a silver-haired stooge, grabs him by the sleeve, pulls him toward himself, and pathetically attacks:

Dominik Tatarka (1913–1989)

was one of the most significant Slovak prose writers, essayists and publicists of the 20th century. He studied French and translated also from the French literature. In August 1968 he opposed the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops in

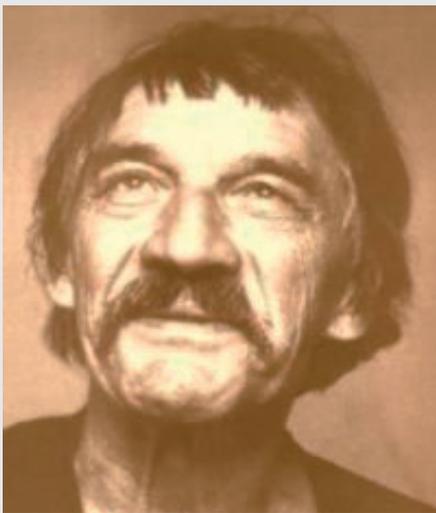


Photo © ???

Czechoslovakia and later he signed the Charter 77. Because of these political attitudes his works stopped being published and were disseminated only in the form of samizdats or editions appearing abroad. In 1986 he was awarded Jaroslav Seifert Prize for his trilogy *Jottings*. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Tatarka's birth his *Jottings for Beloved Lutécia* (*Písáčky pre milovanú Lutéciu*, 2013) and his life confession, *Recordings* (*Navrávačky*, 2013), based on the interviews with Eva Štolbová, have been published.

“Bartolomej, dear Bartoš, it’s been ages since we’ve seen each other! Don’t you even look at me anymore?”

“As you can see, I don’t look at you.”

But the Academician himself, probably in the passion of the intensifying election campaign, doesn’t hear and doesn’t see.

“Bartolomej! The years are passing. Do you want to stay alone, completely alone, like a thumb on a hand, like a sparrow on a rooftop?”

“Screw you, all of you.”

“That’s all right, more power to you, that you estrange yourself, as we know from the theory of Viktor Shklovsky. But it’s harmful, I tell you, harmful, when you separate yourself from us, only you, only you don’t want to be among us and with us. Every moment you keep such distance that no one remembers you anymore. You’re becoming, soon you’ll become, a living corpse.”

“Screw all of you, all of you. Do you hear me?”

“You dare to reject a hand offered to you from the highest places?”

“Academician, let’s drop it. Now I’m thinking of what I want to buy. If I buy brandy or local rum, I should buy Taras Bulba tobacco and rolling papers, I won’t have enough for Mars cigarettes.”

“My God, how you’ve fallen, that you and you, like such and such, need to think whether Taras or Bulba? Pull yourself together. They’re offering a hand to you from the highest places. We want to welcome you among us, so don’t be so stubborn, like an old ram’s horn. You know, in politics you can’t always do things straightforwardly.”

“Academician, doesn’t it seem to you that you’re offending me, when you call my opinions on my personal path to socialism, to democracy, the stubbornness of a ram? They were your opinions too, the opinions of a man who offered you a hand from the highest places, who raised you up to be an Academician, who let bygones be bygones, the fact that you took the stand against him as a false witness. I grew up in this republic, it was always my republic, I think that my, your, everyone’s responsibility, the responsibility of the party and the state organs was to protect the sovereignty of our, let’s say, imperfect republic. And that’s why I left the Party.”

My political opinions haven’t been interesting for a

long time. I just want to say that the Academician and I went at it wildly with each other, then, on the first day of the election campaign. There on the busy intersection in front of the Štefánia café, we barked at each other for about an hour and a half. It’s not important that we, two former friends, were barking at each other, but what was important was that it lasted from ten until half past eleven.

And your first sentence, when I told you, was:

“By chance, by chance I saw you from the tram, how you were standing there with that pillar of the academy.”

I paused immediately at that sentence. Why are you emphasizing that. By chance? Hardly. You weren’t dressed like that. Your sentence should have gone like this: By chance I was going by in the tram and I saw you, how you were standing there. But if not by chance, you send the authorities after me. Later in the Royko arcade in front of the flower shop window, I embraced you with a wedding bouquet of orchids and for god’s sake, you asked me:

“Are you going to vote?”

Although your question didn’t necessarily have any meaning in the town plastered with red for the election campaign: I’m voting, we’re voting, we’re going to vote (manifestly) for the happy future of our children.

*

Then, there, it happened: a long-legged, light-footed nymph leaned out of the tram, jumped off at the stop in front of the Soviet Bookshop. I glimpsed a golden helmet of smoothly-combed, curled-under hair, the color of my faintly-green clothing, a light open-necked blouse, a light draped and triple-stitched skirt, on her feet, light linen sandals, black lacing on her calves – but with her movement, her walk, she fell into my eternal memory. She walked with a light swaying step, the way long-legged, light-footed women walk.

Translated by **Charles Sabatos**

The book *Jottings for Beloved Lutécia* (Písačky pre milovanú Lutéciu) was published by Literárne informačné centrum, Bratislava, 2013.



Slovak Poetry Retains Its Cultural Prestige

Interview the Spanish translator Alejandro Hermida de Blas

Alejandro Hermida is a professor of Slavic philology at the Complutense University in Madrid. Among other Works, he translated the writings of Milan Rúfus (collection *Zvony* (Bells, 2003) and supervised the translation of an anthology of Slovak poetry into Spanish (*Poesía de Eslovaquia. Breve muestra*, 2007).



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• **Dušan Zupka:** *How did you come to be involved with Slovak poetry?*

– **Alejandro Hermida:** My first contact with Slovak poetry was during Slovak language lessons in Madrid. Miroslav Lenghardt, our teacher, gave us a poem by Milan Rúfus to read. Ever since then I've been a faithful reader of Rúfus, I've translated him, and I wrote my doctoral thesis about him. Other poets whom I came to know at that time included Laco Novomeský and Ján Stacho. Initially I began translating those authors for myself, but in the course of time I had three books published.

• **Dušan Zupka:** *Could you say something about the main differences between Czech and Slovak literature?*

– **Alejandro Hermida:** Czech and Slovak literature have different tempos. Czech literature developed earlier, it has a longer tradition, but in the 20th century Slovak poetry matched it and in some cases surpassed it. Taking poetry, in the first half of the century the Czechs have that giant generation of Nezval and Holan. Granted, the Slovaks too have Krasko, Novomeský and Beniak, but they are very much under the influence of Czech modernism or the Czech avantgarde. But if we take the generation of Rúfus and Válek, Ondruš and Stacho, those have no equivalent in Czech poetry. To put it very simply, Czech poetry became more intellectual, often the poem is a play of ideas, whereas Slovak poetry remained more imagistic, more artistic.

• **Dušan Zupka:** *How would you characterize contemporary Slovak poetry?*

– **Alejandro Hermida:** Everywhere in the world, probably, poetry has been losing its social prestige. For most readers the novel is the focus of interest. However, there are societies where poetry retains at least part of its cultural prestige, and Slovakia is one of them. I think this is connected with being a small nation on the periphery of the great historical movements. The citizens of such nations tend to be sceptical of the great narratives, and as opposed to those they give preference to an individual, relative view of the world. Poetry mediates that viewpoint better than the novel or non-fiction literature.

• **Dušan Zupka:** *Who left the most striking mark on Slovak literature in the 20th century?*

– **Alejandro Hermida:** 20th century Slovak poetry

has a rich diversity of poetic personalities. It's hard to find any real poetic schools. But unquestionably there are certain writers (Krasko, Rúfus, Válek)

who have left a more lasting mark. Milan Rúfus gets his expressive power from a synthesis of folklore, biblical and artistic inspirations, and presumably that is why he's such a powerful presence in Slovak poetry in the last half-century, whether directly and positively, or as a negative influence, where someone is trying to break free of Rúfus.

• **Dušan Zupka:** *What are the hazards for someone translating Slovak poetry into Spanish?*

– **Alejandro Hermida:** Slovak and Spanish are very different languages. Slovak, being an inflected language, is more synthetic, where Spanish is more analytic: it needs more words than Slovak to express the same thing. That's not just a problem when translating metrically regular verse. Sometimes one can get a precise metrical equivalent between Spanish and Slovak, then again sometimes one can't, or even when it's possible it may be at the expense of many semantic undertones. There are also expressive differences between the two languages, for example in the use of diminutives. In Slovak they sound more natural, but in Spanish they're not much used except in children's talk, so they might have more an ironical sound.

• **Dušan Zupka:** *How can Slovak poets be of interest to readers in Spain?*

– **Alejandro Hermida:** Readers of poetry, in Spain just like everywhere else, do not have prejudices. They are curious about writers of other nationalities. There are readers of novels who will read only Spanish or American authors. In poetry that's unimaginable: readers will try poetry of all kinds and they're happy when they discover some lesser-known author. It seems paradoxical. Someone might think that the so-called "untranslatability" of poetry would be a barrier to its transmission. But like music, rhythm and imagery are a universal language.

Translated by **John Minahane**

Following the Tailor's Scissors

Mića Vujičić

Translated from Serbian by Zdenka Valentová Belić
Translated from Slovak by Heather Trebatická

Would you know how to whistle the funeral march?

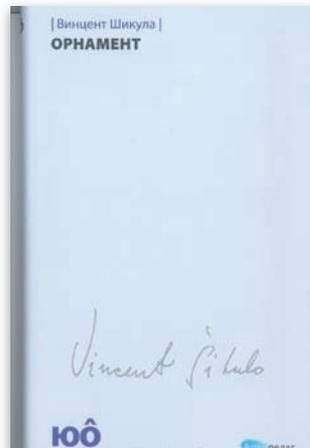
Matej Hóz, the protagonist of Vincent Šikula's novel *Ornament* has it on his lips. In fact he knows by heart whole passages for different instruments. If he found himself in front of an orchestra he could easily conduct it. The tones of classical music persistently intrude in the work and from time to time the heroes of this book escape into its magical world. The president of the country has died and a day of mourning is declared. Black flags are flying; the street lighting is covered with black crepe and there is not a cheerful person in the streets. An accident has happened in the brickworks. This sad March day in 1953 will pass, but the sad and gloomy atmosphere will be felt by the reader of *Ornament* even after the last page.

This novel by Vincent Šikula is marked by feelings of disquiet and fear. The main hero hears strange sounds: a quiet whistling, rustling and tapping. Something is rustling, tapping, cracking in the loft. The footsteps of passers-by under the window disturb Matej Hóz's sleep. He tries to define and localize a vague sound, similar to the clipping of tailor's scissors.

Everyone looks over their shoulder and cannot shake off the feeling that someone wants to harm them. Like a spirit from the street, from the darkness, Jožo Patuc enters the story. A priest on the run, an escapee from prison, a mysterious person, announces to Hóz that he will be living with him.

Ornament is not just a story about the growing into adulthood of a young person who is trying to get along in the everyday life of the fifties in post-war Slovakia, but it is a kind of parable on religiosity. The main hero moves through his text in just the same way as he wanders through the streets. He uses flashbacks and digressions, remembering his student days two decades earlier, while not making a clear dividing line between the two time perspectives. Nevertheless the text of an idler from the nineteen fifties tries in the seventies to become a diary, as if wanting to halt the inexorable flow of time, to create a circle at least around one day.

The frequent digressions do not distance the reader from the main story. Matej Hóz is searching for himself among unfamiliar sounds. For instance, on the day of



mourning he finds inspiration and composes his own version of the funeral march. He tries to define his relationship with his family, friends and girlfriends, and in long conversations with the priest on the run he reassesses his “negative” attitude towards faith.

As until that time he has seen art, freedom, love and honesty as points of departure arising from his childhood, Matej Hóz also has to define his attitude towards the state. That is the last test for a young man who is searching for his place in life, an uncertain journey on which he has set out blindfold. Slovak literature: an odyssey of the spirit

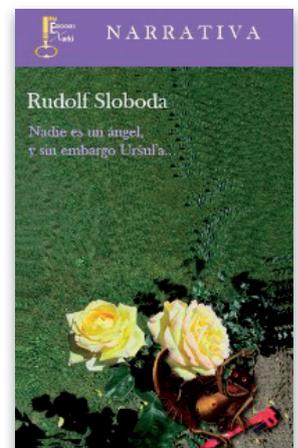
Slovak literature: an odyssey of the spirit

Carlos J. Gonzalez Serrano

Rudolf Sloboda
Úrsula (Uršula)
Ediciones Xorki, Madrid, 2011
Translated by Valeria K. Rivera de Rosales

Under the title *Nadie es un ángel, y sin embargo Ursula* the publishing house Ediciones Xorki have published the novella *Uršula* by Rudolf Sloboda. In a masterly way and with an exceptionally lively narrative style the author deals with the perturbing questions that arise in life, focusing attention on a woman as the main protagonist. Rudolf Sloboda is still little known in Spain. He is one of the most outstanding Slovak writers of the 20th century, but also one of the most controversial in his time.

So far as his literary work is concerned, Sloboda's most productive period coincided with the period when interest in the literature of “Eastern European” countries was at a minimum. In the afterword to the book we can read: “At most, people knew about the dissidents who could leave their homeland and thus take their works abroad with them. Very little or nothing was known about those who with extreme difficulty circulated what was known as *samizdat* literature (secretly written and copied), thus exposing both themselves and their readers to danger. There was also a third group of authors who were pushed aside and not duly appreciated even though they moved within the limits of the official ideology, but who from time to time, albeit with difficulty and restrictions, managed to publish at least some of their works.” Sloboda was one of these. He received a grant from the Union of Slovak Writers to write his short novel



Uršula. The book was first published in 1987. In it the author focuses on the fate of a woman, her position in society and her search for her own place in a personal relationship. It was probably the author's secret wish to portray a woman of strong character, emancipated, decisive, differing from the others in her close circle with whom she was in daily contact. Uršula is the prototype of a woman through whom Sloboda projects his own inner unease and struggle with fate, as he does with his male heroes. In the introduction to the book it seems that Uršula is a character not wholly conventional, but in spite of that firmly rooted in the society and times that are her lot. Two other female characters surrounding Uršula are also emancipated women willing to behave according to their own ideas at various moments in their lives. The curious thing about the male protagonists in Sloboda's works is that he shows their less positive, weak sides, for instance unreasonable jealousy, succumbing to improper passions and brutality. In spite of everything, none of the women in the novella answers to the prototype of an exceptional woman. The intention of the author is to portray life as it is, but in spite of that he does not abandon the search for human happiness. Success depends on how his heroes manage to come to terms with the situations they find themselves in, complicated or otherwise, that life and destiny bring.

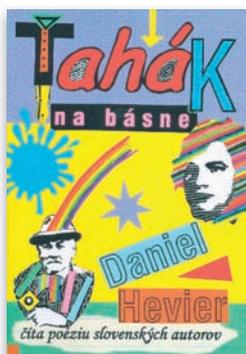
Daniel Hevier

Ťahák na básne

Crib notes for poems

Literárne informačné centrum, Bratislava 2013

This inspiring book by Daniel Hevier does not provide directions, know-how, or guaranteed correct ways to read poems and understand poetry. It has far humbler and more agreeable aims: to infect its reader, who may be a secondary school student or one in the last years of elementary school, with the adventure of reading (for example poetry). And maybe it will also be a source of inspiration for teachers, who sometimes find it hard to cover difficult topics required by the curriculum. In his introduction the author has even stressed typographically the little word „aha“, that is, the moment of discovery, which should be the aim of poetry research. Daniel Hevier has selected 22 poems as a representative sample of the work of Slovak poets from various periods. There are differing interpretations of their texts. The book is not intended to be a textbook or a methodological manual. It simply offers several observations that are open to discussion or argument, that further the search for new meanings. After all, it is in the wide variety of opinions that the beauty of poetry lies.



Tomáš Janovic

Pinkanie Flicking

Marenčin PT, Bratislava, 2012

Tomáš Janovic, writer, aphorist, poet, lyric writer and dramatist has dedicated his latest little book of sad anecdotes to Julio Satinský, who in the production L + S Soirée says: "And it was then that I realised how powerful art is! That it does not preach, it does not guide, it just gently "flicks" you. That is also why in this book Tomáš Janovic just gently nudges us, so that we notice all those falsities we come to terms with every day. This is pointed out by the compiler of the book, the writer Daniela Kapitáňová, who thus pays tribute to his laconicism which, in symbiosis with his well-known humour, is responsible for the crushing effect of Janovic's texts, because after reading them our laughter is no longer light-hearted. The aphorisms also have political undertones, they touch on all spheres of social life, the philosophy of our way of thinking, and reflect our everyday pleasures and fears for our future. This is already the third selection of sad anecdotes, whose design has been created by František Jablonovský, with a selection of illustrations by Miroslav Cipár. This slim volume is also exceptional on account of the carefully thought-out composition of the book as a whole, emphasizing as it does the simplicity, concision and aptness of this kind of art.

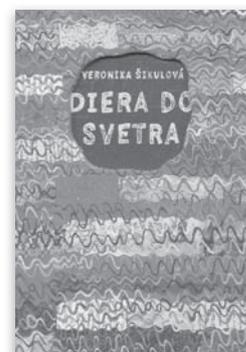


Veronika Šikulová

Diera do svetra Hole in a Sweater1

FSlovart, Bratislava, 2012

Veronika Šikulová's latest book has caused a stir on the book market. Many of her readers think she has "flown off at a tangent". The author herself admits that it is a kind of "joint flight" on the part of the author and the illustrator. In her new little work the author offers a collection of diverse texts. They are divided into six smaller chapters (e.g. Pipi čierna Karkulka/Pippi Black Riding Hood, Za slávičím humnom/Beyond the Nightingale's Backyard, Od svitu do mrkvy/From Dawn to Carrot2...). Each presents a mosaic that depicts the author's world through a variety of texts of varying lengths. They are prosaic, poetic and at the same time forceful. "They are not poems, most of them are prose and if by chance there is a rhyme, then only because it appeared by chance," Veronika Šikulová says of her work. Her tales are



interesting in that they are not invented. The author's world as presented in the illustrations, which embraces her beloved dad, children, the town of Modra with its bizarre little figures, a French horn, love, the garden, birds, prayer and literature, has been created by the illustrator Martina Matlovičová.

- 1 The title is a play on the words sveta/svetra, so (to make) "a mark on the world" becomes "a hole in a sweater".
- 2 By changing *mrku* to *mrkvy* - "From Dawn to Dusk" becomes - "From Dawn to Carrot"

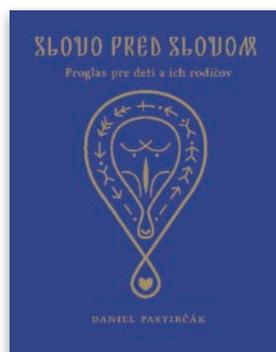
Daniel Pastirčák

Foreword to "Foreword"

Slovo pred slovom

Proglas for children and their parents

Through his poetic interpretation of the precious ancient text by Constantine the Philosopher the writer Daniel Pastirčák explains to children its message and importance for our culture and mutual understanding. He knows that the secret of the word is hidden in our oldest literary relic - Proglas, but in order that children might understand it too, he offers them his own poetic interpretation of its meaning. The illustrations by artist Miloš Kopták show the mysterious graphic signs that record words, and therefore human speech in written form. The overall appearance of the book is the work of graphic designer Paľo Bálik. This limited bibliophilic edition contains 23 free graphic sheets with illustrations by Miloš Kopták. On the back of the graphic sheet are the verses by Daniel Pastirčák, accompanied by the verses of Constantine's Proglas, whose message is clarified by Pastirčák for today's young reader.



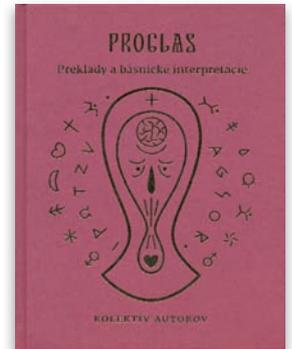
Each illustration has been signed personally by the author.

The book was published by the Centre for Information on Literature, Bratislava, 2012

Proglas

Translations and Poetic Interpretations / Preklady a básnické interpretácie

The book Proglas - Translations and Poetic Interpretations, in which we find texts of exceptional beauty and quality, is enhanced by the translations and interpretations of dozens of contemporary Slovak poets (Feldek, Buzássy, Haugová, Zambor, Džunková, Kuniak, Hevier, Ondrejčka, Ondrejková, Jurolek, Podracká). Proglas is the oldest literary relic in Old Church Slavonic.



It is a foreword written by Constantine the Philosopher (St. Cyril) to his translation of the Gospels. It is a guide in verse to the Old Church Slavonic translation of the Bible. In over a hundred verses without rhyme he explains the need to translate God's word into the language of the Slavs. This literary work is in itself a celebration of scholarship, wisdom and the written word; it explains the need to read and study the Divine Word in a language that we can understand. The poem is unique; it has a wonderfully complicated composition that proves it is a work comparable with the world's greatest poetic compositions. It is a celebration of books, a celebration of letters and a celebration of the word. In addition to the excellence of the content, it is remarkable for its highly refined expression and style.

The book was published by the Centre for Information on Literature, Bratislava, 2013

Slovakia - Guest of Honour at the Prague Book Fair 2013

The title "Guest of Honour" at the Prague Book Fair 2013 was awarded to the Slovak Republic. The Centre for Information on Literature, together with its partner organisations (the Ministry of Culture, Anasoft litera, the Association of Slovak Publishers and Booksellers) prepared four full days of programmes and presentations of Slovak literature and culture. Together, more than 70 writers, musicians, artists, politicians, publicists and critics appeared in one of the various programmes. Also, thanks to the SLOLIA committee generous financial subsidy, the not less than 20 books translated and published in the Czech Republic was an outstanding number. Many well-known guests visited the Slovak stand and programmes in the different locations, including the Slovak Minister of Culture, Marek Madarič, the former Prime ministers of

Slovakia, Iveta Radičová and Ján Čarnogurský, the former Czech President Václav Klaus, and popular musicians such as Peter Cmorík and Marián Giešberg.





Text pod foto



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The portraits of Slovak writers were written, compiled and translated by Daniela Humajová, Ina Martinová, Mária Smoláriková, and Dušan Zupka. The book reviews on p. 39 and 40 were translated by Heather Trebatická and Saskia Hudcová. Supervision of English Texts: Adrian Brown. Supervision of German Texts Simon Gruber. SLOVAK LITERARY REVIEW / REVUE DER SLOWAKISCHEN LITERATUR. Registration number 2984/10. © Centre for Information on Literature. Address: Námestie SNP 12, SK-812 24 Bratislava, Slovakia. Tel.: +421-2-204 73 507, 204-73-512, Fax: +421-2-52964563, Internet: <http://www.litcentrum.sk>. Editor-in-Chief: Daniela Humajová, e-mail: daniela.humajova@litcentrum.sk. Editors: Ina Martinová, e-mail: ina-martinova@litcentrum.sk, Mária Smoláriková, e-mail: maria.smolarikova@litcentrum.sk, Dušan Zupka, e-mail: dusan.zupka@litcentrum.sk. Graphic Design and Layout: 3H creative studio, spol. s r. o., 2013. Printed in Slovakia by: ETERNA PRESS, s. r. o.

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