

FAIR NEWS

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The Changes of Sunny Alexandria

Many have likened the Egyptian writer **IBRAHIM ABDEL MAGUID** to Nagib Mahfouz. And yet there is one significant difference between Abdel Maguid and the Nobel-prize laureate. Unlike Mahfouz's work, his texts are not dedicated to Cairo, but to the port town of Alexandria. The writer talked about the changes of this city, and his work, in front of a large audience.



„Today it is no longer the shiny Alexandria I wrote so much about,” he says about his native city. Maguid's best-known works are set at the time of WWII, when the Egyptian city became the place of exile to many people driven from their countries by the fighting. Alexandria had the character of one of the greatest centres of Mediterranean culture. It was re-

nowned for showing its tolerant and gentle face and its cultural wealth was amplified by the presence of various ethnic minorities, such as Greeks, Syrians, Jews or Egyptian Christians. The author also writes about the ensuing decades that had changed Alexandria. „In the seventies Alexandria lost its tolerance. It became a wahabbist city. Shops owned by the Europeans were

closed, Syrians had left. Alexandria was gripped by an atmosphere hostile towards foreigners,” the writer adds.

But the situation in Egyptian literature had also changed. „Writers emerged who were prepared to break the social taboos. And now we have a new generation, focusing on topics located outside of the mainstream,” Maguid said in response to one of František Ondráš's – the moderator of the programme – questions. The writer himself is not that far removed from these young artists. In his 2011 book he describes the events on Tahrir Square, mentioning, among other, graffiti and other artistic expressions of young artists. He also emphasises the importance of poetry and short films, which, according to him, are the fastest to react to events in dynamic times.

And which Czech author is Ibrahim Abdel Maguid's favourite? „I have read Karel Čapek, War with the Newts. But I consider myself to be an existentialist, so if you are asking for one name, I would probably say Franz Kafka.” OŠ



Azerbaijan's Literature in the World

Azerbaijan introduced itself as a Book World exhibitor for the very first time last year. Its participation proved so successful that we can see its book production again this year. „We are happy to be back. Last year's presentation was largely focused on our ministry of culture, while this year the attention shifts to the Centre for Translations,” the director of the Centre Ms. **AFAG MASUD** says. „We have been involved in literary translations for more than twenty years now. Our translations from Czech literature include, for example, Jaroslav Hašek. We wish to acquaint Book World visitors not only with our book production, but also with titles translated into the Azerbaijani language. I am sorry to have to admit that we have not brought any translation of our literature into Czech. We are at the very beginning. Until now our communication with the outside world was largely done through Russia, but this is changing now. Azerbaijan, just like the Czech Republic, is an independent state now, and we don't need any third party for external communication – we can translate directly from one language to the other,” Afag Masud says. „I am happy that we have met with translators and also with the chairman of the Czech PEN here at the book fair to discuss contacts to Czech authors. Our mutual co-operation is getting under way and I therefore believe that next year we will be able to bring one of our books translated into Czech.” JaM

JÍŘÍ THEINER'S AWARD FOR SJARHEJ SMATRYČENKA

The thirty-eight-year-old Belarusian Czech studies expert and translator **Sjarhej Smatryčenka** became the 5th laureate of the prestigious Jiří Theiner Award for outstanding contribution to the dissemination of Czech literature abroad. On Friday afternoon the author received the award from the expert jury's chairman Vladimír Pistorius. „There is a number of Belarusians who care about their language and would like to make certain that it keeps on living,” the fresh laureate of the award admitted. His method of promoting interest in his mother tongue is through the publishing of translated literature. He told the Fair News what approach he adopts when selecting authors for the Belarusian language versions.



„There is no single key I would use. I always strive for balance in terms of period, gender and topics. It goes without saying that the book should be very good, a joy to read, and comprehensible to Belarusian audiences. When a work is up-to-date, this is also a great asset, but this can apply both to brand new books as well as to older texts, which resound in Belarusia today. Examples include Havel's essays or Hájíček's Fish Blood (Belarus, which has suffered so much from Chernobyl, is currently building a new nuclear power plant under highly non-transparent conditions). Often, however, we also translate some texts as they are needed, for example for thematic issues of various magazines.”

What S. Smatryčenko's translations sound like was briefly heard as part of the Friday's ceremony, when the author recited his translation of Václav Hrabě's poem Lullaby, best known to Czech audiences in its musical rendition by Vladimír Mišík entitled You II. IK

A Century of Egyptian Short Stories

The Modern Egyptian Short Story, a book introduced at this year's book fair, was no doubt one of Book World's highlights for all ardent readers of Arabic literature. The book was launched on Friday afternoon in the presence of **CHARIF BAHBOUH**, representative of the Dar Ibn Rushd publishing house.



The book contains not only stories by the literary greats of Egyptian prose, but also a selection from the work of younger authors, spanning a period from 1913 till the present. It was translated by many teachers and students of the Institute of Near East and Africa at the Charles University's Arts Department, a team headed by František Ondráš. Some were present in person to read short excerpts from the works. It is also worth noting that some of the stories included in the book were translated into Slovak, which means that even our Eastern neighbours can enjoy the works of these Arabic writers in their mother tongue.

The collection was published to mark the Book World book fair and Egypt's participation as the guest of

honour. We are again reminded of the impact this event has on the Czech book market. A similar situation occurred four years ago, when the Industrial Palace played host to representatives of Saudi Arabia. Back then, translators had also joined forces and brought out a book entitled Anthology of Modern Arabic Short Stories.

But it was Charif Bahbouh himself who presented, at the conclusion of the programme, the main proof of the fact Modern Egyptian Short Stories were published to mark this special week. „I kindly request the readers to open the book carefully. The printers only finished their work in the small hours of the night and the glue has not dried yet,” he warned all the impatient readers. OŠ

AUDIOBOOK OF THE YEAR TAKE TWO

Needles to say, audiobooks are a phenomenon of recent years, enjoying an ever-increasing share of the general public's attention.

It therefore naturally follows that as of last year the production of audiobooks can boast its own competition for the very best titles. The 2014 Audiobook of the Year awards were presented on Friday afternoon as part of Book World. Tympanum's rendition of **Solaris** was awarded for the best sound, while **Oldřich Kaiser** was awarded as the best actor for his exceptional interpretation of Bohumil Hrabal's novel *Bambini di Praga* 1947 (Radioservis). **Gangsta Granny** from Tympanum was voted as the best children's title of the year. The best audiobook in the Reading category is **The Lewis Man** read by **Jiří Dvořák** and published by OneHotBook. The best audiobook in the Dramatisation category is the radio title **4x Inspector Maigret** (for the third time) produced by Radioservis. **The Alphabet Who Knew How to Count** by Jonas Jonasson as performed by **Martin Stránský** on the Panteon label has received the Readers' Award. Martin Stránský was also awarded a special award for his contribution in the field of audiobooks.

The 2014 overall winner is **A Man Called Ove** read by **Jan Vlasák** and published by OneHotBook. IK

Book World Champions or Children's Joy in Literary Joust



Two literary competitions for children and young people were held on Friday as part of the book fair programme. The Book World company presented them as part of its readership support campaign **Growing with the Book**.

First, results were announced of the competition entitled **Book in a Title Role**. Over two and a half thousand works were entered in the competition in three age categories, and the jury selected ten best works in each category. The successful authors were invited to the awards ceremony hosted by the actor Lukáš Hejlik, who also read the best works, along with his colleague Věrka Hollá. The winners received gifts and a diploma (the picture shows winner of the 3rd category Magdaléna Nešněrová).

In the early afternoon a ferocious battle broke out in the form of **The Readers' Duel**, which requires the contestants to display a truly detailed knowledge of books, on which they receive the trickiest of questions. This year's competition was attended by 69 classes from all around the Czech Republic. In the live final round at the Exhibition Grounds the best-prepared team – students from the elementary school in Orlová – won the title. JCh



Being a Writer Abroad

On Friday afternoon, presenter Jiří Podzimek invited two Czech writers of a distinct voice, who share the experience of having lived abroad for a long time, for a talk. The two authors were PATRIK OUŘEDNÍK and JAN NOVÁK.



The topics introduced to the debate by the traditionally well-read host Jiří Podzimek were numerous indeed, from growing close to another language, to the readers' acceptance of slang and vulgarity, which, according to Jan Novák, is still more developed in America than in the Czech Republic. The authors also talked about their take on the literary awards and titles they have received in the past. Patrik Ouředník admitted, without wanting to belittle any of the awards, that the one that made him the happiest was a small French ward, accompanied by twelve bottles of a „very, but really very good wine“. Publishing politics were also discussed, and Jan Novák bemoaned the fact that given the small size of our market, literary agents cannot work here to the full extent

as they do across the ocean. Patrik Ouředník painted a rather optimistic picture of the situation in France, describing the respect towards literature that is still engrained in the public, but he also added on a more sceptical note that even in France such situation will not last forever. „Is it possible then to earn one's living in America or in France solely by writing books?“ Jiří Podzimek asked. Patrik Ouředník said that in France there are some two thousand writers at the moment who publish their works regularly, and only about eight to twelve of them live on literary works exclusively. And Jan Novák dryly added: „I probably could make a living in America just writing books, but I would have to write cook-books.“

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Samizdat Film Literature Emerges

It would appear that 25 years after the Velvet Revolution everything that had been published in the samizdat editions during the normalisation period has already been studied and published. But quite the opposite is true. Some topics still remain largely unexplored. One of them is writing on the topic of films both in the samizdat and in exile. A four-year research project conducted by the National Film Archive is reaching its final stage this year and it should result in the publication of a critical anthology of these texts in autumn. The debate on the subject was attended virtually, on a big screen, by the critic **Michael Špirit**, and, in person, by the playwright **Milan Uhde**,

who recalled his own texts published in the samizdat magazine *Obsah*. *Obsah* (Content) was an un-edited „non-magazine“, featuring regular contributions from 19 authors. Each had the obligation to bring any type of literary or journalistic text in 20 copies, from which 20 copies of the „medium“ was assembled. One was for abroad, where it had regularly been transported by the West German embassy's cultural attaché, while the 19 remaining copies were kept by the authors themselves. The sophisticated conspiracy also gave the miscellanies their name. The participating authors could always argue in their defence that it is not a magazine, since it has no title. The title

page always merely bore the word „obsah“ (content), followed by a list of the articles included. Hence the name of the periodical miscellany – *Obsah*. Milan Uhde himself published in *Obsah* his critical review of the television film *Aféra Platfus*, made in 1986 by the Czechoslovak television, based on Zdeněk Svěrák's screenplay. Critical essays and reviews of film and television works would also appear in the more traditionally approached *Kritický sborník*, participated upon by the likes of Luboš Dobrovský and Jan Trefulka, and later also in *Revolver revue*. For a more detailed study, however, we have to wait until the fall, when the book will be published. Raš

Writing Desk as a Medicine

Meet Russian writer, philosopher and cultural historian **VLADIMIR KARLOVIČ KANTOR**.

„An intellectual is called an intellectual, because he simply cannot live without thinking, without reading and without putting his thoughts on paper. In any case, whenever I do not write or read, I get sick. And I mean literally. And the only medicine available to me is to get back to the writing desk. I've been doing this all my life,“ the Russian writer and thinker Vladimir Kantor admitted during a

meeting on Friday. He was accompanied by the translator Alena Morávková, who has recently introduced the Czech literary public to Kantor's first book published in Czech – an anthology of three novels entitled **Is There a More Disgusting Being Than Man?** The book is a biting and yet deeply human look at the realities of present-day life in Moscow. Each of the stories also offers profound philosophical and psychological reflections and ideas. Vladimir Kantor elucidated on how he wrote the novels, while also describing the roots and departure points of his literary work. He admitted to a lifelong split between literature and science – he could rely on science whenever the social environment was hostile to his creative efforts. He also talked about Czech authors to which he feels special affinity, such as Karel Čapek, Franz Kafka or Jaroslav Hašek. „Since I was young I would keep re-reading *Good Soldier Schweik* to the point of knowing some of the sentences by heart to this day.“ In Kantor's opinion, honesty to oneself represents a crucial aspect of any literary endeavour. As he says: „Writer is an independent rank, which nobody can bestow on you and nobody can rid you of.“ IK



DICTIONARY OF THE YEAR

The meeting, marking the Dictionary of the Year awards ceremony, did not stop at discussing the laureates' contribution to the field. Much discussion ensued concerning the tricky nature of translating and the way dictionaries are created. On the whole – an interesting and fruitful encounter for Book World's visitors. A look behind the scenes at how dictionaries are made is not nearly as boring as it may sound. Dictionaries have long ago evolved beyond the cliché of an entry in a certain language, followed by a corresponding entry and explanation in another language. Today's dictionaries have a much greater scope, a fact proved by one of the winners, a book entitled **Gay /Warm/ Prague: A Guide to the Capital City's Queer History 1380–2000**. Jan Seidl and his authors' collective responsible for this rather unconventional dictionary told the book fair visitors how the book came to be, as well as how he had looked for the



origins of the word „teplý“ (warm), often applied to homosexuals in the Czech parlance. „I personally think it is a translation from German, but the origin remains unclear,“ Jan Seidl said with a smile, as his work had earned him a special mention. The jury's award for a one-language dictionary went to Zdeněk Vašků and his book **Hold slunci, dešti půdě a pluhu** (A Tribute to Sun, Rain, Soil and the Plough). The jury's award for a translation dictionary was presented to Jan Valeška and his **Slovník anglických frázových sloves a odvozených jmenných složenin** (Dictionary of English Phrasal Verbs). In the Encyclopedia category, the jury selected Jiří Hruža and his book **Svět měst** (The World of Cities), and in the

Historic-encyclopedic work category the award was given to Eva Semotánová and collective of authors for their **Akademický atlas českých dějin** (Academic Atlas of Czech History). Miroslav Horáček received the Electronic Dictionary Prize for his **Fish Atlas**. The main prize – the 2015 Dictionary of the Year award – was presented to **Soubor 7 slovníků pro interkulturní práci** (Set of 7 Dictionaries for Intercultural Work). The award was accepted by a strictly female collective of various ethnic origins, which only testified to the fact that the dictionary was created by very erudite authors. Sixty one titles were entered in this year's competition – one more reason to congratulate the winners. JaM

A Chilean? A Poet!



Near the end of the second day of the book fair, the Literary Cafe played host to a debate dedicated to Chilean literature. The meeting enjoyed the auspices of Chile's ambassador to the Czech Republic Rodrigo Gaete, who also held the welcoming speech. The literary significance of the country on the shore of the Pacific Ocean was addressed by Anežka Charvátová, Anna Housková and the Prague-based Chilean writer Jorge Zúñiga.

Focus was very soon turned on the controversial character of Nicanor Parra. This anti-poet, whose centenary has recently been celebrated, is recognised for his work on revitalising the Spanish language in modern poetry. He also liked to provoke, however, and made many enemies both on the Chilean political right and left. Czech readers only know him from the poetry collection *Básně proti plešatění* (Poems Against Balding), published here

over a decade ago. This will very soon change – a new collection of Parra's texts is being prepared by the translator Petr Zavadil. Other discussed authors included Gabriel Mistral, the storyteller Luis Sepúlveda, the globe-trotting Roberto Bolaño, the detective story writer Roberto Ampuero or the recently deceased rebel and transvestite Pedro Lemebel. The audience was also interested in the name of Isabel Allende. This writer, sometimes nicknamed „Márquez in skirts“ because of her affinity to magic realism, is best known in the Czech Republic for her romantic novels. A stack of thin red books lying on the table in front of the debaters created a small sensation at the end of the programme. To mark the above-mentioned centenary of Nicanor Parra, the embassy of Chile published a collection of several of his poems. Even though the texts were in Spanish, many visitors showed eager interest in the work. OŠ

Everything You Wanted to Know About Czech Readers

An exceptionally fruitful debate was held on Friday afternoon as part of an event entitled **Readers' Republic?**. Literary scholars **FILIP TOMÁŠ** and **JÍŘÍ TRÁVNÍČEK** introduced their book **double-bill Překnížkováno (Too Many Books) and Reading Bohemia**.

Both publications focus on the state of readership in the Czech Republic, the overall interest in reading, and the stratification of readers according to various criteria based on age, social status, demography and other. The debate, based to a large extent on the cyclical survey from years 2007, 2011 and 2013, offered many interesting information. We can say, for example, that as far as reading is concerned, the Czech Republic is doing fairly well. In the group of those who read at least one book a year we count, along with Holland, Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries, among leading contenders. When considering readers who declare the reading of an average of seven books a year, we register above average, and where the „reading aristocracy“ is concerned with more than fifty books a year, we score way above the international average. One percent of participants reads poetry regularly, twenty percent occasionally, and full fifty percent are certain that they have never encountered poetry in their reading lives. The survey also showed that the much-feared internet represents little threat to reading as such. Professor Jiří Trávniček has called it „a supernova in Gutenberg's galaxy“. Data related directly to Book World were also of interest. It is much better known among its visitors from outside of Prague than among the inhabitants of the culturally oversaturated capital. Other topics included the politics of subsidies and publishing activities, in which Mr. Trávniček emphasised the outstandingly accomplished historical personality of Jan Otto. On the whole, however, we need not be pessimistic as regards the topic of reading or not reading. Czech readers seem to persevere – a fact testified to by the four-fold increase in the book market in recent years, eight-fold increase in magazine publishing, twenty-fold increase in radio broadcasting and eighty-fold in crease in television broadcasting. Exact numbers are available in both the above-mentioned publications. IK