

FAIR NEWS

21. BOOK WORLD PRAGUE
International Book Fair and Literary Festival

2015 SUNDAY 17.5.

Don't Let Them Take Away Your Language or Three Ladies in Exile

A debate with three outstanding representatives of our culture, who have a long experience of living in exile, was held on Saturday morning as part of this year's Book World topic of the Czech literary diaspora. The programme's host Milena Štráfěldová from the Czech Radio, who has focused on expatriates for many years, welcomed the opera singer SOŇA ČERVENÁ, the editor and journalist JIŘINA RYBÁČKOVÁ and the writer IVA PROCHÁZKOVÁ.

At the start of the debate the ladies recalled the reasons for leaving the country of their birth in the first place. „I knew that with that wall they are also walling up my desire to sing,” Soňa Červená described her dramatic escape through the last open passage in the Berlin Wall in 1962. „I took my handbag, got in the car and to avoid suspicion I only packed a single book – *Temple and Fort* by Pavel Eisner.” This book accompanied her for the next forty years. Jiřina Rybáčková left with her husband through France and then to the United States. From the seven dollars they had in the pocket during the transatlantic flight, they spent three on her husband's birthday party. Iva Procházková, daughter of the renowned writer Jan Procházka, prosecuted by the regime, gave up her struggle with the system in 1983, and together with her family went first to Austria, eventually to settle in Germany. All



three women provided interesting insights into what it is like to settle into a new environment. Jiřina Rybáčková mentioned a group of several Czech friends living in New Jersey, who would meet over some traditional Czech dishes and maintain their mother tongue in crisp condition. Iva Procházková, on the other hand, had little praise for her very limited contacts with the Czech community in Germany. She soon began to intensely work on her German, which would enable her to translate her own books, still written by her in Czech, and thereby preserve their meaning, as well as the spirit and the rhythm of their language. She wrote three novellas describing her experiences with the new environment. The first

one was written while still in Czechoslovakia, the second one in Austria and the third in Germany. They were subsequently published in a single volume as *The Crossroads Guesthouse*. The long years spent abroad had only strengthened Soňa Červená's already firm ties to her native language. „I thought to myself – if they have taken everything else, I won't let them take away my language.” While in exile, Soňa Červená not only read and translated, but also taught foreign opera singers to sing in Czech. She thereby greatly contributed to the fact that Janáček's works are sung in the composer's native language in opera houses around the world.

IK

Writing Reminds Me of Jazz Composition

Early on Saturday morning, Book World visitors could meet in person the successful Swedish actor, playwright, director and writer JONAS KARLSSON. A short delay was caused by the number of autographs he had to give along the way to the venue – a proof that even the Czech audiences (focused predominantly on home-grown talent) heed this Swedish author.

His acting career in Sweden spans 20 years and includes countless roles both on stage and in cinema, with some major ones, such as Richard III. When he started writing, the editors would never fail to mention that the book was written by the actor Jonas Karlsson. Now his writing enjoys such acclaim that this no longer needs to be emphasised. The world of literature has accepted him as a full-fledged writer. All this means that Jonas Karlsson has two identities – the actor and the writer.

What made him start writing? The author described his literary beginnings in his own words during the debate. „I started writing as a child – diaries, comic books, short adventure stories. But my real writing only started when I began doing theatre. During rehearsals I started being critical to the texts. Sometimes I had the feeling that a certain scene could be written slightly differently, that it could be shorter, and so on. Then I thought:

If I think I'm so clever, why don't I write something myself? I gave it a try. I started writing dramas. But that didn't satisfy me. As you know, drama is merely a sequence of direct speeches and I began enjoying learning something more about the characters. I founded a second ensemble and while writing a play, I would put little comments about the characters down on the side. As time went by it gained volume and all of a sudden I realised I was spending more time with this second ensemble than with the main one, where a play was being staged. That's how I began writing short stories and novellas.”

A Czech translation has been made of one of his more recent novellas, *The Room*, an ambiguous and somewhat absurd model situation with a distinct sprinkling of humour. Czech readers will no doubt appreciate a certain modern-style link to the work of Franz Kafka. When asked how he writes, Jonas re-



plied: „I always set off from some little detail, often a fragment of a conversation. It gives me inspiration and I start developing it. Writing itself often takes me to a completely different place than I expected. To me writing is like composing a jazz piece. You can never say in advance where the text is going to go.” His answer to the query why he prefers shorter literary works, short stories and novellas, was a good example of form fusing with its content: „I adore short stories.” RaŠ

Female Novels in Egypt

To us in Central Europe, Egyptian novel is an almost exotic term. The literary borders between these two worlds have been, at least partially, broken down through Egypt's participation in the role of the book fair's guest of honour. This gave Czech readers the opportunity to take a closer look at Egyptian literature and meet some of its authors in person.

An interesting meeting was held on Saturday before noon – a discussion with one of a handful of Egyptian female novelists, the young writer and journalist **MANSOURA EZ-ELDIN**. Given the cultural and religious differences, women writers in Egypt have to face certain barriers, break down some taboos and overcome some deeply-rooted social clichés. „Women started making greater impact on literature only in the 1990s. Back then newspapers and magazine were created, in which women played key roles, and more female authors turned to writing novels,”



Mansoura Ez-Eldin says. Egyptian authors often describe what is happening around them and project onto these events the problems of the entire society, such as sexual harassment and the depreciation of women. „We are still bearing witness to women authors having to use pseudonyms not to taint the family hon-

our. These are the taboos we want to topple by attempting to conduct dialogue with people around us. We are trying to give more importance to the text, its quality and the message that it brings, than to whoever writes it – woman or man,” Mansoura Ez-Eldin concluded this interesting intercultural debate. JaM

PHOTOGRAPHS AND WORDS



Writer **JÁCHYM TOPOL** and photographers **GABINA FÁROVÁ** and **PAVEL HROCH** met at the book fair to talk about their latest works and their mutual respect.

Even though the screening of the photographs was somewhat marred by direct sunlight in the Literary Theatre, taking away some of the pictures' beauty and focus, they still made a great impact on the visitors through their captivating atmosphere. Gabina Fárová introduced her photography book entitled *Manoeuvres*, dominated by little toy soldier, familiar to every boy. She put them in unusual places and situations, added beautiful models, and interesting, if somewhat eccentric, photographs resulted. „When I was asked to write the texts to accompany these pictures, quite often I got carried away by the beauty of the models and the entire photograph,” Jáchym Topol, whose words in the book adopted a similarly dream-like quality in keeping with the pictures, admitted. „These pictures have a different impact on everyone, which is good,” the photographer said in appreciation of his words. Compared to her sometimes romantically stylised photographs, the pictures of Pavel Hroch are bleak and his soldiers terrifyingly real. His photographs tell the story of the Velvet Revolution. „While Gabina creates the situations which she then shoots, I record them as they happen around me,” he explained the difference between their two approaches. „These snaps were at the bottom of the drawer and only now their time has come. I took them when I was still a student,” Pavel Hroch, who is still today mostly involved in journalistic photography, added. „You both make photographs of different things, using a different style. If you were both taking pictures of the same thing, I think I could still tell them apart. You have your original style, you are both unique,” Jáchym Topol paid a tribute to both photographers at the end of this encounter. JaM



Doors to German Literature Open Wide

We are displaying increased appetite for the works of German writers. This is also thanks to a programme entitled *Das Buch*, which introduces German authors to Czech readers. It was as part of this project that Book World visitors could meet the young German author **STEFANIE DE VELASCO**.



The thirty-seven-year-old native of Oberhausen lives in a wide-spanning multicultural environment. She studied ethnology and political science in Bonn, Berlin and Poland. All these experiences are reflected in her literary debut *Tiger Milk*, published in the Czech Republic by Plus publishers in Jana Zoubková's translation. „*Tiger milk is the name of the cocktail the book's main protagonists Nina and Djamila drink. They met at a German housing estate and are trying to step out of childhood and into their adult lives and to understand the world they live in, which is not easy,*” the author briefly outlines the main plot of the book, for which she was nominated for the German Literature for the Youth Award last year. But besides the less or more problematic coming of age, the story also has a second layer. The girls' lives are influenced by the German reality of having to come to terms with immigrants, members of other ethnic origins. Djamila's family faces deportation and it is against the backdrop of this threat that the two girls live out their friendship, which can be severed at any time by a political decision. The topic of ethnic minorities is a pressing one also in the Czech Republic, which is one more reason why Czech readers could find *Tiger Milk* an interesting read. JaM

Czech Writers in Exile

What were the private and working lives like of Czech authors, who spent some or many years abroad? The Saturday debate on the topic was conducted by **PETR BÍSEK**, **LUBOMÍR MARTÍNEK** and **JAROSLAV MAREK-VEJVODA**, under the watchful eye of **Stanislav Brouček**, author of several projects on the topic of exile.

The meeting was marked by many personal recollections. In its first part, the participants would recall the key moments in making the decision to leave the country of their birth, as well as their first steps abroad. „At first I worked as a welder, but I wasn't very good at it, so I started washing dishes in a hotel for three francs an hour. Then I worked as a librarian and I also sorted packages at a post office. After that I began studying at a university in Bern and finally, step by step, I could start doing what I really wanted to do, which means writing,” Jaroslav Marek- Vejvoda remembers his beginnings in Switzerland, which became his new home. „To this day I remember how I had 180 dollars in my pocket, two suitcases, and how I was getting off a boat that brought us to America. I had absolutely no idea what to do next,” Petr Bísek added his memory. He eventually settled in the United States, where for twenty years he published an expatriate newspaper. Lubomír Martínek ended



up in France. „I arrived there on December 26, and I can still remember the fear of not knowing what will happen next.” The second part of the meeting focused on their first creative achievements. „As soon as I learned that Škvorecký had an exile publishing house, I sent him my first book. It was later made into a successful film starring Pavel Landovský, which received several awards. I gradually became a Czech writer in a country which speaks three languages and whose nation speaks and writes differently. Total confusion,” Jaroslav Marek-Vejvoda says with a smile. „Back

then we were welcome everywhere as a source of new cultural perspectives, a breath of fresh air. The next wave of exiles coming to France from more distant places such as Angola was in a much more difficult position. Looking back, I have to say we had quite easy beginnings,” Lubomír Martínek stated. All the participants agreed that some years ago such an encounter would belong to the realm of dreams, as they never imagined they could return to the country of their birth. Luckily, all this had changed in 1989.

JaM

Egyptian Novels in the 3rd Millennium

Writer and journalist **HAMDY EL GAZZAR** came to Prague to talk about his literary works. Although he counts among the younger generation of Egyptian writers, he has already authored four successful novels.

But this is not the only literary form in which the Cairo-based author excels. „I started out by writing various theatre plays and TV series,” El Gazzar describes his career as a writer, „but then I developed great interest in writing short stories.” From short stories the author moved to another of his favourite literary form – poetry. „My texts were getting shorter all the time and in the end I realised that I can express all I wanted to say in four verses.” His first poetry collection was published in 2012 and El Gazzar read excerpts from it to readers gathered. What difference does he see between prose and poetry? „In a poem the author has to use strongest of words to make an impression on the reader,” he says. „But words often do not say what we want them to say. Unlike cinematography, literature lacks sufficiently strong means for expressing everything.”

One of the questions to the writer concerned the use of colloquial forms of language in Egyptian literature. Even though El Gazzar makes use of colloquial Egyptian Arabic in some of his works, he does not consider it suitable for poetry. „For me the standard written language is the most accurate one, because I can sense the ever so slight differences of individual words. These nuances are different depending on where you use any



given word. Colloquial language is largely generalising and I don't see it as suitable for the poetic form of expression.”

To conclude with, Hamdy El Gazzar shortly introduced the literary festival in Cairo of which he is a co-organiser. This year it was held for the first time, enjoying the auspices of Egypt's ministry of culture. The festival's guests included the Nobel-prize winning author Orhan Pamuk and it enjoyed a favourable reception from the public.

The programme was followed by a reading from the author's works. OŠ

SFFH Academy's 2014 Awards

Best SF

George R. R. Martin – Gardner Dozois – Daniel Abraham: Hon na lovcě /Hunter's Run/ (Laser-books)

Best Fantasy & Horror

George R. R. Martin: Rytíř Sedmi království /The Night of the Seven Kingdoms/ (Argo)

Long-term Contribution to SF Award

Josef Pecinovský

Jaroslav Veis, z. c.

Best Original Czech or Slovak Book

Vilma Kadlečková: Mycelium – Pád do temnot (Argo)

Book of the Year

Andy Weir: Marťan /The Martian/ (Ikar)

Best Translation

Richard Podaný: Potopená města /The Drowned Cities/

Best Art Work

Tomáš Kučerovský: Excelsior, gentlemani!

Best Short Story

Tomáš Bandžuch: Konec věku páry /The End of the Steam Age/ (Excelsior, gentlemani!)

Promising Novice / Achievement of the Year / Special Award

Audiovydavatelství Walker & Volf

Best Publisher

Argo

Best Short Story Book

Michael Bronec – Martin Stručovský (eds.): **Excelsior, gentlemani!**

(Straky na vrbě)

Best Magazines

XB-1

Fine Arts in the Land of the Pharaohs

There is more to Egypt than works of literature, as Book World visitors learned during numerous film screenings at the guest of honour's stand. Another of the many aspects of his country's culture was presented in Prague by the artist and professor of the history of art at the University of Cairo, **KHALED SOROUR**. The programme in the Large Theatre was hosted by Katarina Patrášová.

How have fine arts changed in Egypt since the tumultuous year 2011? „You know, no revolution changes art immediately, it takes some time,” Khaled Sorour says. „That is what makes graffiti truly revolutionary, as it can react to events immediately. I like this folk form of expression very much, as it originates in the Nubian traditions of house decorating.” The Egyptian artist often draws inspiration from the Nubian culture, but it is not the only source of his ideas. „I have also always looked for inspiration in children's games and in the colours children use in their drawings,” Sorour says.

Sorour also mused about the beginnings of his career: „My parents didn't want me to study art. Maybe it would have been acceptable for them if I was to make a living doing



music, but this they considered utter lunacy. But I had already fallen in love with painting and Cairo.”

At the time of his studies, the Egyptian cultural scene was somewhat restricted and bound by the regime. „Back then people would say ‚art equals state’. The ministry of culture owned all the galleries and if you were not a part of the ‚establishment’, you

had no place in them,” the fifty-year-old author describes. „Today the situation is different. The financing of the various institutions has improved and there are also many sponsors, both from Egypt and from the West. There are now some forty galleries in Cairo alone. If I nowadays decide to hold my exhibition, it is fairly simple!” the Egyptian painter adds with a laugh. OŠ

Waiting for My Seventh Photograph

To mark the 80th birthday of the photographer **JAN SAUDEK**, Slovart publishing house prepared a large monograph featuring reproductions of his pictures. The book was introduced at a debate attended by the photographer Jan Saudek himself, the curator Daniela Mrázková and Slovart owner Juraj Heger. The legendary author's proverbial vigour dictated the format of the event – the entire presentation took the form of a series of questions, to which Jan Saudek willingly, almost exuberantly, offered his answers. Here is a selection from his dialogue with the public and the moderators.

How many photographs have you taken?

Six or seven. Every true photographer takes six or seven real pictures in his life. I am still waiting for the seventh one.

How many women did you have in your life?

You cannot have a woman. I once heard about some cannibal who cut his wife to pieces and ate her – now he indeed had her. But other than that, women are not to be had. Women are like the clouds, the sky, the river. These are elements you cannot own.

Were you happy with the biographical film *The Photographer*? To what extent is it really a biography and which parts are fiction?

The basic storyline of the film – that in the beginning there was a rich photographer and his poor girlfriend and in the end there was a rich girlfriend and a poor pho-

tographer – is authentic. It also contains a couple of scenes, which, while being played by actors, feel to me like a live broadcast from the past with real people. There are some authentic things and it is absolutely clear that it will be these the prosecutor will build his case upon. But other than that it is a work of fiction. One friend even told me: The guy in the film, that was really you, except that you look better in that film.

Your photographs are sometimes jokingly likened to a photographic album of your large family. Who do you make them for?

I take pictures for women. Of course men will find their vulgarities in my pictures, that is beyond discussion. For them I am not a photographer, but rather a pornographer. But what my pictures are really about, this is only understood by women.

Raš



THE CZECH DIASPORA

STANISLAV BROUČEK from the Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences and senator **Tomáš Grulich** from the Permanent Committee for Expatriates introduced Book World visitors to the history of the Czech diaspora.

„The reasons for Czechs to go abroad were changing throughout the centuries,” Stanislav Brouček said at the beginning. „The first ones left because of their faith, others were looking for agricultural land, after the war and in the 1960s the main motivation was political. Nowadays Czechs are leaving for job opportunities.” Not only the reasons for leaving homeland were changing, but also the destinations of the exiles. „Initially they were headed for neighbouring European states, but some also settled in Nordic countries. In the 19th century some states would actually offer incentives to immigrants in the form of cheap farming land. This resulted in some Czechs moving to Russia or, for example, to the much discussed Banat, where the Czech community lives to these days.” The economic crisis prompted many Czechs to go to the United States, where farming land was easy to come by. „Czechs founded many settlements, cities and towns with Czech names. America’s map includes, among other, Prague, Brno, Velehrad, along with other names. But we can also find Czech expatriates in South America, the temporary home of Tomáš Bata, who gave his name to several small South American towns.”

Senator Tomáš Grulich noted that with the passing years, the Czechs’ attitudes to expatriates were also shifting. *„After 1949, going into exile was considered a criminal act and it was also presented as such, which resulted*

in a deformed view of the exiles in the eyes of many Czechs. After the revolution, on the other hand, people were inclined to a negative perspective of the outflow of experts, especially those from the field of healthcare.” But the opening up of the borders after 1989 also made the Czech expatriates consider re-settlement in their old country. „Some, however, had spent too long a time away from their homeland, their past connections were severed, they no longer had any friends here, and in the end they returned to the country where they had lived for the most part of their productive age. But they still consider the Czech Republic their homeland,” Tomáš Grulich explained the story of some of our countrymen. Being a leading member of the Czech Senate’s committee for Czechs living abroad, he followed by assessing the position the Czech state adopts as regards its expatriates. *„The state should stay in touch with its expatriates and support their links with their homeland. Much work still remains to be done in this respect. In order to facilitate this communication, we would currently need to establish an independent body,”* he explained. He mentioned Slovakia as a prime example of how this topic can be approached, as our neighbours have resolved all issues concerning the state’s communication with its expatriates, while we still have a lot to improve upon.

JaM

Going to the Roots

Three interesting programmes were held as part of this year’s Book World, describing the lives and work of Czech expatriates in three different countries – Sweden, Switzerland and Austria.



Second of these programmes took place on Saturday afternoon, providing its visitors with a chance to watch a documentary film from the series entitled Czech Roots, dedicated to the country of the Helvetian cross. The event was attended by writer **BLANKA KUBEŠOVÁ**, who lives in Switzerland. *„I certainly didn’t jump up with joy. I wasn’t exactly thrilled as I had many other things to do,”* she recalled her initial feelings when asked to take part in the shooting of this documentary. *„Only when Czech Roots were actually broadcast and they were embraced with such a feeling of togetherness, all my doubts had left me and I realised what a great idea this had been and that it worked.”* The project was initiated by the Český dialog magazine, published since the year 1990. During the last three years it appears on the internet only, but it still represents a very important point of contact with the Czech Republic for the expatriates. Martina Fialková from Český dialog describes the film thus: *„Our main concern is not to go forty of fifty years back in time, to the times when Czech people were going abroad. Above all, we want to present their contemporary lives, show what the expats are doing and what we at home know very little about, what represents their contribution to our culture.”* The documentary film is doing precisely that. After the screening, Blanka Kubešová introduced her most recent literary work, story of a Jewish woman in Nazi-occupied Poland, entitled Drops of Joy and Hope.

IK

Radka Denemarková’s New CONTRIBUTION



On Saturday afternoon, the writer **RADKA DENE-MARKOVÁ** introduced her most recent novel **Příspěvek k dějinám radosti** (Contribution to the History of Joy) at the book fair. One of the most translated contemporary Czech authors than discussed her work with the Germanist Dana Pfeiferová from the Arts Faculty of the University of České Budějovice.



A SCANDAL IN CAIRO



Future Arabic studies experts have transposed their command of the language into the field of art. They even perform theatre in Arabic – although, ironically, their ensemble bears the name of the Arabic Non-Theatre. They chose a show based on the novel *A Scandal in Cairo* by the Egyptian Nobel-prize winner **NAGUIB MAHFOUZ**, and performed it at the book fair on Saturday evening.

A Textbook Revolution

In recent years electronic books have attracted ever-increasing levels of attention. Publishers cannot overlook their existence. On the contrary, they should be finding ways of taking part in this development, and selecting fitting platforms for their books. Fraus publishing house, which has joined the Flexibooks platform, serves as a good example.

„Our publishing house has developed its very own platform several years ago, but since things are moving forward fast, in the end we decided to enter into co-operation with the Flexibooks platform, which covers all our needs, but also offers some attractive benefits. It allows us not only to distribute books to readers using this channel, but in the process we also learn who our target customer is, what interests him or her, what are his or her needs,” Radka Šmahelová from Fraus publishers says. „We are the only ones who provide publishers with data about their customers. This information is essential for their work, as it enables them to further improve their offer, which is important for us, too,” Flexibooks representative Antonín Chadima explains. „We are here for the au-

thors and publishers, we want to help them. We don't support e-shops with cheap books, quite the contrary – we protect the publishers' data using fail-safe coding, and on top of that make it possible for them to sell books from their own e-shops using our platform.” Eduko is yet another publishing house to have joined forces with the Flexibooks platform. „This system is a great contribution to our work because we update our textbooks on annual basis and an electronic platform is ideal for such amendments,” Petr Klinský explains. Daniel Ševčík from Prodos publishers stresses that Flexibooks enable them to easily incorporate some modern elements into their book titles. „We must meet the needs of teachers who make use of modern technologies in their teaching. The use of these technologies among students is also on the increase and we wish to fulfil their needs, too. Feedback from customers is also important for us.” Flexibooks is constantly developing, reflecting the needs of the publishers. „We are asking ourselves if one day, perhaps, an electronic textbook could even replace every student's copybook – a textbook in which the student could highlight and underline

text according to need. Another interesting possibility are textbooks designed for teachers, with the option of including methodical notes,” Petr Klinský enumerates. Some potential practical obstacles were also mentioned. When the wi-fi network malfunctions, for example, which it occasionally does, students availing of electronic textbooks would be left stranded. „It would, therefore, make sense if these textbooks would also offer the possibility of working with some of their content offline,” Petr Klinský adds. Antonín Chadima from Flexibooks listened attentively to the requests of the publishers, explaining that they are already working on some of them. „We are trying to take all such needs into consideration. Textbooks for teachers are already being prepared. We are also attempting to establish a link to the school educational system, which feature, I hope, the schools will find very interesting. Our textbooks already include an exam supplement and there is more to come,” Antonín Chadima says. Judging from this discussion, we will experience a revolution in education in the coming years, wherein electronic textbooks will play the leading part. JaM



BOOK WORLD PRAGUE

2016

12.–15. 5.

We look forward to seeing you

Prague Exhibition Grounds

BOOKWORLD.CZ

SVETKNIHY.CZ