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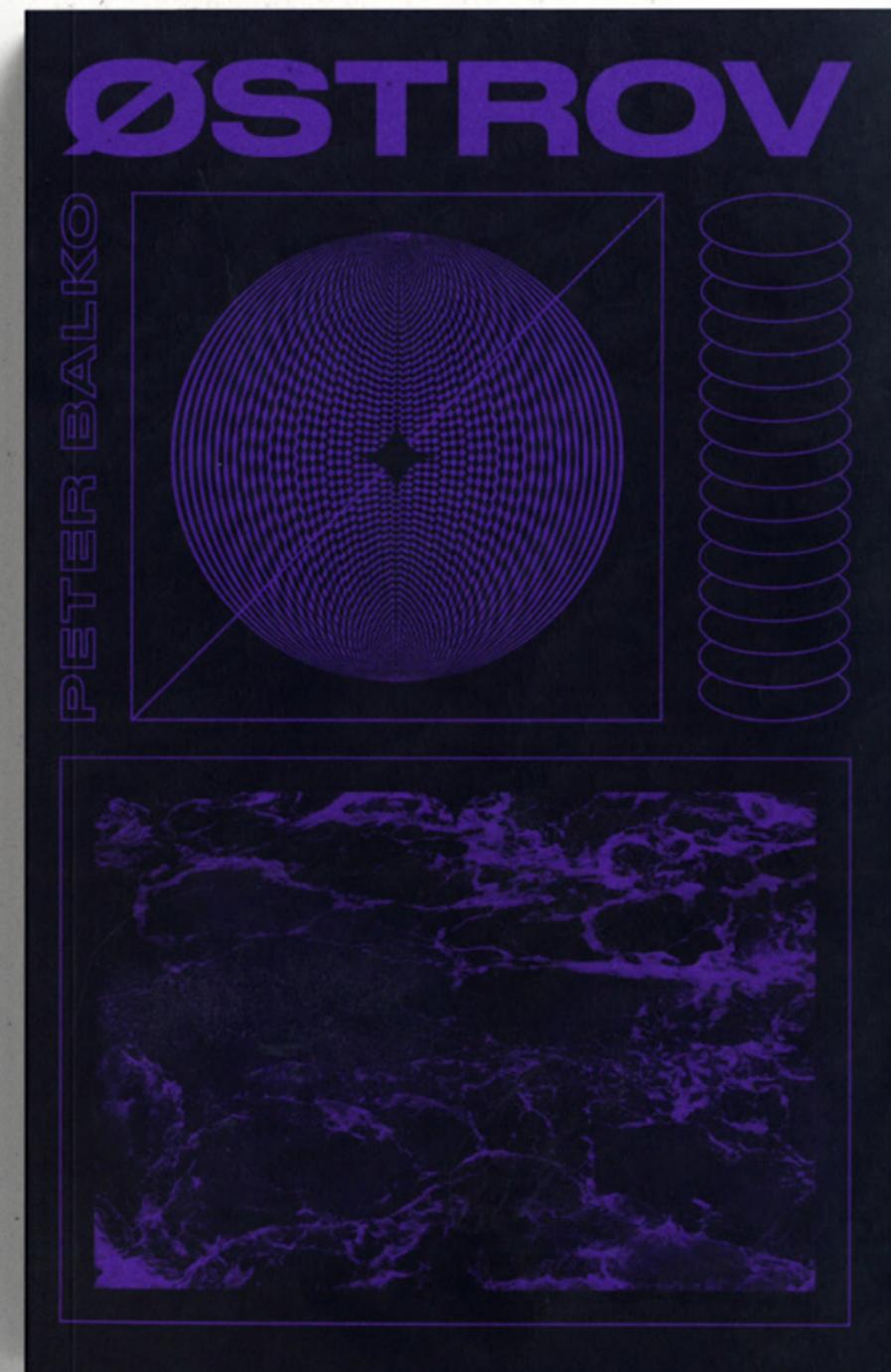
SLOVAKIA

The Island

WHAT CONNECTS THE MYSTERIOUS DEATHS OF SOME WRITERS, A CEMETERY OF TYPEWRITERS, SOME STOLEN MANUSCRIPTS AND THE Ø SECRET SYMBOL?

When Peter Balcko's second book appeared in the bookshops, a reviewer in one of the quality dailies immediately warned readers: "If you're afraid of fantasy, don't come near this book." But though this exciting novel by the author of the bestseller *Vtedy v Lošonci* is primarily about the power of fantasy, it is also about the act of writing. In telling his story, Balcko combines detective thriller and parody together with other elements of so-called genre fiction. Will the novel's main protagonist, an aspiring young writer, manage to find his famous counterpart stuck somewhere between reality and fiction on the secret Østrov island?

PETER BALKO



In hospital they told you that Dad had died.

You had mild concussion, a body covered in bruises and a three-centimetre open wound on your forehead. You shared a room, redolent of sweat, urine and tears, with a seven-year-old sociopath recovering from a messed-up circumcision and a burly young lad whose father had turned him into a swollen piece of meat. After two days of boredom you started to explore the hospital, hiding uneaten scraps from the kitchen in a ventilation shaft. The whole time you suspected that the tobacco-scented doctor and nurse with wrinkled cleavage were just actors who had been hired to prepare you for the role of orphan.

A Polish lorry-driver found the smashed-up Lada Niva and an ambulance took you to Poprad Hospital. It was the worn-out policeman who told you, the one you'd described the deer that had run across the road to. Then you scribbled your statement down in your jotter and drank up your morning tea.

You weren't surprised to hear that despite all the circumstances you had still wanted to protect your father. It was not out of pity, though, but more out of revenge because you knew that his worst punishment would not be prison or a stay in a psychiatric ward but the pain of lifelong solitude.

"Daddy had to have a very big operation," said the nurse changing your drip. "But he'll be better soon and then you'll go home. I bet you're looking forward, aren't you?"

During your explorations of the hospital's catacombs you came across your dad in the post-operation department. He was lying motionless on a bed with lots of pipes connecting his body to a blinking machine that looked like something from an East European sci-fi film. His face was swollen and his sagging chest barely moved; his grey hair, once so lustrous, was lank on the sweaty pillow. He looked repulsive and fragile. His right arm, wrapped up in a bloodied bandage, disappeared beneath the hospital counterpane. Then you noticed that his arm was now only a stump, cut off just above the elbow.

When Dad opened his eyes, you could see shame in them, a shame which only the dead can convey when looking upon those they have left among the land of the living.

News of the revered artist, Jakub Baza's accident, was instantly in the media and brought Svetlana Savojská back after many years. She hadn't aged by a single second: neither her short red hair cut into a fringe, her playful hazel eyes, thin lips, black long-sleeved turtleneck nor her lily-of-the-valley fragrance with its hints of molten metal. In hospital her elegant insolence soon created a stir, she signed Dad's discharge note and then she drove you home.

She then stayed with you for a full ten days.

She had never had a reason or need to care for another person because she was a lifelong nomad who found her home in permanent movement. And though she didn't know how to cook or clean, she both cooked and cleaned. Three times a day she changed Dad's bandages and applied to his stump a yellowish ointment smelling of vinegar and nettles; at nights she soothed his fever with cold compresses and strong antibiotics. Every morning she prepared a little snack for you, then took you to the grammar school in Revúca; after school she helped with your civics and geography homework. (...) For two hundred and forty hours, Svetlana Savojská, became mum to both you and Dad.



PETER BALKO 1988

Photo © Dávid Koronczí



Personally I don't think authors should fight in order to present their work – and if they attempt to, it won't really get them anywhere. The media can, of course, promote a book but if it isn't very good, it won't make much of a mark. But if a book starts to live its own life and readers start recommending it to others, then there is some point to it.

Peter Balko *Østrov*

Published by: Koloman Kertész Bagala
Bratislava 2019, 216 p.
ISBN: 978-80-89973-24-8

Translation Rights:
booksfromslovakia@litcentrum.sk

Prose and scriptwriter, a graduate and teacher at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava and winner of the Short Story Award 2012, he is co-author of the *Literature dot sk* prose anthology and contributed poems to the book *Metrophobia*. As a screenwriter, he worked on the feature-length films *Candidate*, *DOGG*, *The Line* as well as the *My Rebellion* miniseries. For ten years he has been organizing the Medzihmla Festival in Lučenec and now lives in Bratislava with his wife Vera and their fat black cat, Luna. He debuted with the novel *Once Upon a Time in Losonc* which won him The Ján Johanides Prize for young authors (up to 35), The 2015 Tatra Banka Foundation Prize in the Young Author category and the Anasoft Litera 2015 Reader's Prize.

Translated titles:

CZECH
Tenkrát v Lošonci (Once Upon a Time in Losonc)
Větrné mlýny, Brno, 2018

GERMAN
Zusammen sind wir unbesiegbar (Once Upon a Time in Losonc)
Zsolnay Verlag, Vienna, 2020

POLISH
Wtedy w Loszoncu (Once Upon a Time in Losonc)
Biblioteka Słów, Warsaw, 2019

HUNGARIAN
Akkor, Lošoncon (Once Upon a Time in Losonc)
Pesti Kalligram, Budapest, 2020



The Flaneur's Shirt

**"I AM AT HOME IN THIS STREET; IN THIS STREET, I AM KING."
THIS WAS THE MOTTO OF ONE OF SLOVAKIA'S MOST SUCCESSFUL
AUTHORS AS SHE STEPPED OUT INTO THE STREETS OF BRATISLAVA
TO GIVE HER OWN INIMITABLE PORTRAIT OF THE CAPITAL CITY
AND ITS INHABITANTS.**

The Flaneur's Shirt is a work of non-fiction telling the story of 8½ Bratislava streets. The first inspiration for the book was an interview of the author with Fabian Saul, editor of the *Flaneur* magazine, which in every issue looks closely at one street in a different city around the world. The book offers various perspectives, details and microworlds: just as some people like roving through forests, a flaneur goes round cities, not being choosy, not looking just for the pretty or attractive, but wandering everywhere. This movement becomes the flaneur's obsession: for them such activity is not walking but working.

JANA BEŇOVÁ

FLANÉROVA
KOŠEĽA

Jana Beňová



LOM – FROM A BUTCHER’S SHOP TO A SOUND STUDIO

A few years ago, there was a butcher’s shop here, typical for the area in being a multipurpose place with tables where you could stand to eat and drink. Passers-by peering through the window would see men drinking bottled beer, wearing woolly hats in the winter, the dirty floor of the place in contrast to its white wall tiles. Since last spring, however, it has been home to the LOM sound laboratory and cultural centre; after the Artfórum bookstore, it is the second shop of its kind to change into a cultural venue. In Bratislava butchers and artists seem to complement each other. In the window there are still pictures of pigs’ and calves’ heads but now there’s also a sign saying LOM. A person going past might think a new eco/bio/paleo butcher’s is going to be opening here, a place where meat is not going to be chopped up and butchered but conquered and broken.

From the outside the place looks almost empty. A bicycle is leaning against a paper; in the corner there are a few books and beneath them a piece of paper with AudiolibRARY written on it. “The books are mostly about electronic and experimental music; visitors can borrow them and we also lend out recording equipment,” says Jonáš Gruska from LOM.

The space at the front is used for parties, concerts, film projections, workshop, lectures and meetings, usually about field recording or electronic music. “In the back we make microphones and other sound equipment. Downstairs there is a workshop and workbench where we do the usual ‘dirtier’ work. In the basement there will be a studio. There is also a biolaboratory there where we grow fungi and algae,” says Jonáš. Microphones are specially made for use outside the studio – in the field. They have a specific design. “They are small, easily stored, low-hum – ideal for field recording. We export them all over the world but mostly to the US and the UK.”

I tell Jonáš about a friend I have who records sound inside the silence of church buildings. And in the silence which he records, he looks for a sound, which, once he finds it, he tries to draw out and amplify as much as he can. Are they similar people?

“Yes. As are people who record the sounds of nature and sound designers who produce sound effects because every computer game, film sound and telephone application needs a design.”

When asked how he got into production of special audio equipment, he replies that he himself is a ‘recorder’ and at first he just made microphones for himself. He records sounds in many different settings – from the sounds of nature to those of industry and the household. He then puts them on the internet so that people who are interested can download them.

Jonáš says that LOM is on Mlynarovičova because finding a place with a ‘manageable’ rent in the Old Town was a problem. So he went to the housing office in Petržalka. “Most premises had been converted into offices with plasterboard partitions. They didn’t appeal to us very much. But we liked this old butcher’s shop with its red and white tiles, even though we are vegetarians,” he smiles. He adds that is a kind of ‘retro’ place with lots of original 1980s features. After it was cleaned up, it felt like a hospital or laboratory.



JANA BEŇOVÁ 1974

Photo © Denník N – Tomáš Benedikovič



I watch to see what happens in the street, find out what is interesting and special about it, what scandals it is associated with or what is most interesting about its history, what it is like at night and what awaits it, perhaps, in the future.

Jana Beňová

Flaneurova košela

Published by: BRaK, Bratislava 2020,
346 p.

ISBN: 978-80-89921-32-4

Translation Rights:

booksfromslovakia@litcentrum.sk

She was born in Bratislava. Her novel *Seeing People Off* received the European Union Literature Prize in 2012 and has been translated into ten languages including English, German, French and Arabic. The author of three poetry collections and four novels, Beňová has worked as an editor with the daily SME and the Theatre Institute. She is currently a columnist with the independent daily Denník N.

Translated titles:

ENGLISH

Away! Away! (Preč! Preč!)

Two Dollar Radio, Columbus,
2018

Seeing People Off (Café Hyena)

Two Dollar Radio, Columbus,
2017

ARABIC

*As sādija wal māsušijja (Twelve
Short Stories and Ján Med)*

Ibn Roshd, Káhira, 2017

Café Hyena (Seeing People Off)

Sefsafa Publishing House, Giza,
2016

CZECH

*Café hyena. Plán vyprovázení
(Seeing People Off)*

Paseka, Praha, 2010

CROATIAN

*Café Hyena. Plan pracenja (Seeing
People Off)*

Hena com, Zagreb, 2014

FRENCH

*Café Hyène. Un plan
d'accompagnement*

(Seeing People Off)

Le Ver a Soie, Virginie Symaniec
éditrice, Charenton-le-pont,
2015

MACEDONIAN

*Kafé Chyena. Planot za isprakanje
(Seeing People Off)*

Magor doo Skopje, Skopje, 2015

HUNGARIAN

*Café Hyena. Elkísérésí tervezet.
(Seeing People Off)*

L' Harmattan Kiadó, Budapest,
2017

GERMAN

Abbauen! (Away! Away!)

Residenz Verlag, St. Pölten, 2015

Café Hyena (Seeing People Off)

Residenz Verlag, Salzburg, 2017

Parker. Liebesroman (Parker.

A Love Story)

Erata, Leipzig, 2008

SLOVENIAN

Kavarna Hyena (Seeing People Off)

Založba Malinc, Medvode, 2020

SPANISH

Café Hiena (Seeing People Off)

Sextopiso, Madrid, 2020

ITALIAN

*Café Hyena. Programma
di accompagnamento.*

(Seeing People Off)

Atmosphere libri, Rome, 2017



All Those Worlds

WHAT WILL BE SPECIAL ABOUT HUMANITY WHEN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE BECOMES BETTER THAN US AT ALMOST EVERYTHING?

The experimental graphic novella *All Those Worlds* tells the story of two highly-qualified professionals and their efforts to tackle new threats posed by the latest technology. Both analyse the work of Helios, pseudonymous founder of an anti-technological movement whose teachings are propagated by his followers using social networks, 3D holograms and other new communication channels. The main protagonists, He and She, find out that Helios' messages have a strange effect on some people and realize that the case calls for an extremely careful and special approach. In the course of their intensive and exhausting work, however, they discover that something is not quite right...

**JURAJ ČORBA
DÁVID MARCIN**

VŠETKY TIE SVETY





Technology continues what was started by ancient armies, serving as a means of establishing order, maintaining control and spreading influence. Those who want to run the world will have to tame our new technology. But success is not guaranteed.

**JURAJ ČORBA
1978**

He studied Law and Political Science and has worked as a lawyer and representative of the Slovak Republic at the Court of Justice of the European Union. At present he is developing a programme focussing on the social impact of new technology for GLOBSEC as well as overseeing a series of essay collections about current global challenges for the Absynt/Kalligram publishers. He is an initiator of the Danube Fund, a Central European Foundation focused on development of public spaces and infrastructure in the Slovak section of the River Danube, as well as pianist in a group called Thebenbound. *All Those Worlds* is his literary debut.

Photo © The Archive of Knižná revue



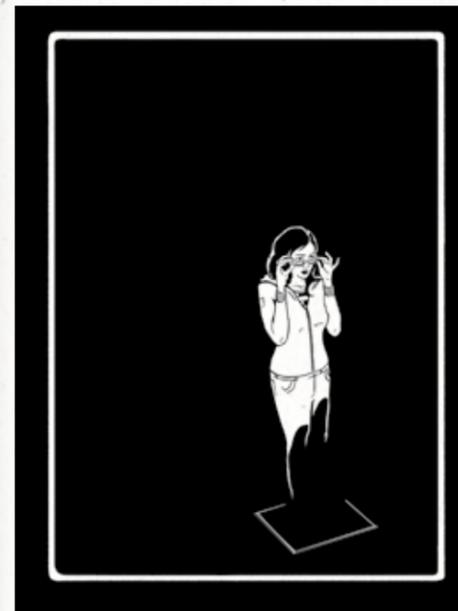
**DÁVID MARCIN
1991**

He is an illustrator, cartoonist and teacher who works predominantly with digital graphic programmes. In collaboration with the Czech writer, Petr Měrka he has created the graphic novel *Van Gogh of the 21st century* and its indirect sequel *Van Gogh and the Dawn of History*, both of which have also been published abroad. As well as this, he has been collaborating with the scriptwriter Soňa Balážová on the children's comics *Golden Tooth*, which came out in book form in 2019. Dávid is also co-founder of the Pomimo civic association, which publishes graphic novel anthologies and organizes artistic courses and lectures about comics and illustrations.

**Juraj Čorba, Dávid Marcin
Všetky tie svety**

Published by: Slovart, Bratislava 2019,
176 p.
ISBN: 978-80-556-4360-1

Translation Rights:
booksfromslovakia@litcentrum.sk

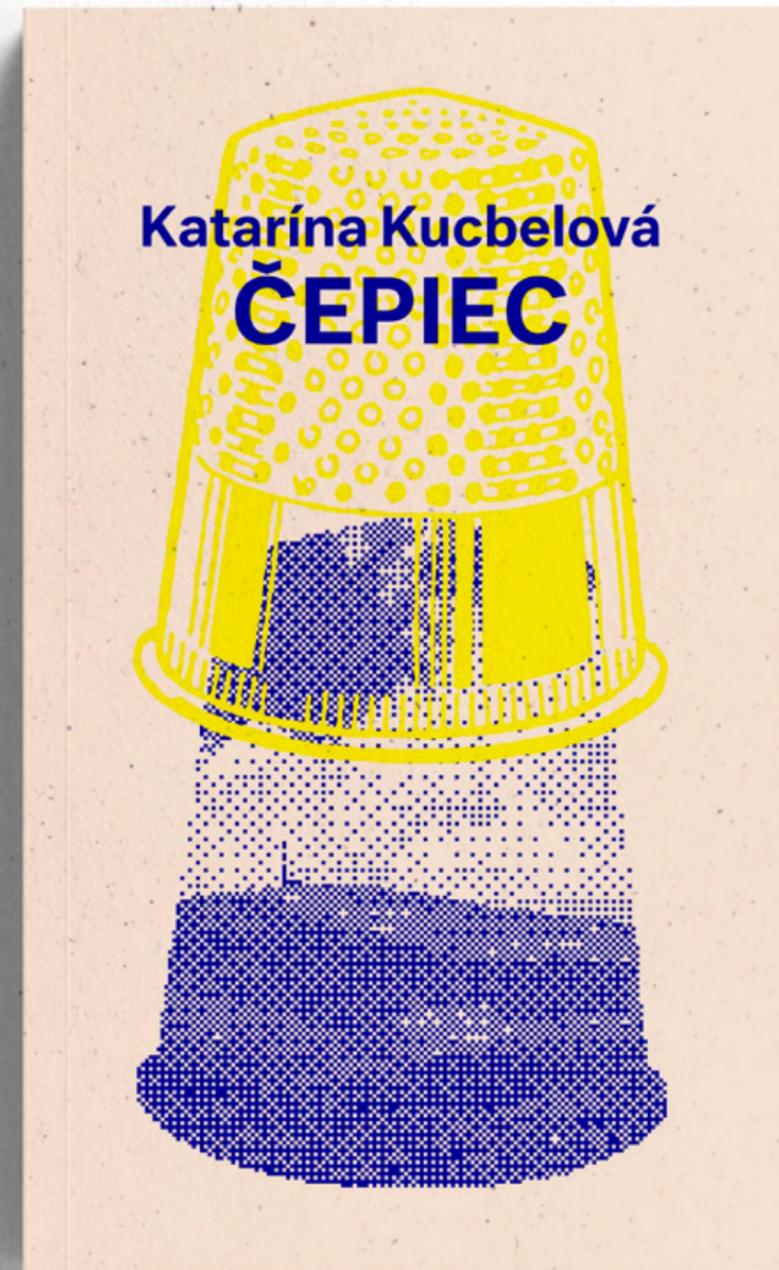


Bonnet

THIS POWERFUL COMBINATION OF LITERARY NARRATIVE AND DOCUMENTARY NOVEL IS THE PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF AN AUTHOR WHO FOR TWO YEARS REGULARLY TRAVELLED TO THE REMOTE MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY OF ŠUMIAC IN CENTRAL SLOVAKIA TO LEARN HOW TO SEW A BONNET, AN IMPORTANT PART OF A WOMAN'S FOLK COSTUME.

This book uncovers the unromanticized relationship between past and present, personal identity and ethnocultural stereotype as well as (the complicated relationship) between the majority population and the Roma minority – the centre and the periphery. It is a picture of contemporary Slovakia depicted via a closely observed intergenerational meeting of two women with very different experiences of life.

KATARÍNA KUCBELOVÁ



And now you know everything about me.

What if she also has a plan to recall her whole life, to wrap up the tale and let it run through my head, which is still capable of putting it all together into a whole? She can hardly remember the recent past at all.

She lost it in 1989, I can find little out from then on. A thirty-year friendship with a psychologist. But a thirty-year period after the age of fifty has a completely different intensity than after the age of twenty, is so much weaker. There is nothing during the last ten years, the tenor finished studying and responsibility ended. No records have been kept. And now you know everything about me. I am writing it all down anyway. She knows I'm keeping a written record. Perhaps she likes the idea there will be a book.

But you mustn't reveal my name because I will come and haunt you.

She believes we'll be here after death or doesn't believe she will live to read this book. She'd come and haunt me (it's what I heard in my childhood) and come beating on my door. Il'ka is sure it will be possible. Life behind closed doors.

Your name will be Il'ka.

Il'ka, Elenka, Ilonka. You won't be called Hela, Ela or Jelena, though you would like to be called Jelena. But it is my book and that name wouldn't be you. You will be just as I see you and as I remember you. They will be the images I need.

The life of Il'ka is my story. I need it in order to put my own together again. I will rewrite those sentences until I adopt them as my own; I will choose the words I like. But that will be another book. It won't be about her or me. I will leave us in the lower layers and in their interstices. Only the book will remain. For its own sake. It won't be for me or for Il'ka. Nothing will haunt us any longer, we won't be startled by someone banging on our door with a stick.

When I write another book, she will sit by me, she will be by each of my books as she is now. She will tell me do it as you wish or show me and I'll start it for you. Our heads will touch, sometimes our shoulders. Sometimes we will hug each other.

It will be Il'ka because I have chosen her.

Il'ka doesn't have Gizela's bitterness and implacability. How so? She doesn't know but she understands what I'm talking about. She must have realized sometime that she could have had it but decided not to.

She picks up on things but mostly judges them very soberly. She mentioned Facebook, for instance: why do people reveal so much there? She can't understand it and naturally feels it's ridiculous to tell everyone you're pregnant or post a photo right after giving birth.



KATARÍNA KUCBELOVÁ 1979

She is a writer, poet and cultural manager who co-founded and ran the Anasoft Litera awards from 2006 to 2012. After publishing four acclaimed collections of poetry, she wrote her prose debut, *Bonnet*, in 2019. The book was shortlisted for the Anasoft Litera Prize 2020.

Photo © Natália Urbliková



I don't want to explain to this sweet woman who has been wearing village costume all her life that I have no special affection for folklore. It bothers me how it is interpreted, overrated and degraded somehow, how it is misused by every regime. I don't understand why in Slovakia we have chalets instead of restaurants, why we have wooden huts everywhere – next to the motorway, between housing blocks, in towns and in villages.

Translated titles:

SPANISH

Una pequeña gran ciudad

(A Little Big City)

Ediciones Olifante, Zaragoza,
2018

UKRAINIAN

Znae, ščo zrobit' (He Knows

What He'll Do)

Krok, Termopil, 2020

Katarína Kucbelová Čepiec

Published by: Slovart, Bratislava 2019

184 p.

ISBN: 978-80-556-4203-1

Translation Rights:

booksfromslovakia@litcentrum.sk



The Last Baroness

THE TALE OF A STRONG WOMAN AT THE END OF HER LIFE, A BARONESS, WHO DESPITE BECOMING AN EXILE IN HER OWN HOME DURING THE TURBULENT SOCIAL CHANGES FOLLOWING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, IS DETERMINED TO RETAIN HER DIGNITY AND ENJOY HER EXISTING LIFESTYLE. WITH HER, HOWEVER, IS A MAN KEEPING RECORDS WHICH HE THEN SENDS STRAIGHT TO STATE SECURITY.

This documentary novel covers historical changes which so disrupted the order of things that those at the top of the social ladder fell to the very bottom in a heartbeat. In his latest book, Silvester Lavrík tells the story of Baroness Margita Czóbelová, a woman whose life was irresistibly shaped by historical events such as the end of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the First World War, the first Czechoslovak Republic, the Second World War and then the arrival of Communism. As a Hungarian, she was seen after the war as an enemy of the state, almost completely ostracized and saved only by the fact that she had helped partisans during the war. Dispossessed of her family seat, the Renaissance mansion in Strážky where she had spent her whole life, she was allowed to go on living there. Despite her sudden state of poverty, however, she went on painting, swimming in the nearby river and looking after the mansion and its valuable contents until the end of her life. Misunderstood by the age in which she lived, she wrote at length about it in her extensive diaries. This resilience of character enabled her to survive all the events and setbacks affecting her family and home, wars, revolutions and the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century depriving her of almost everything she had. The narrator and recorder of her tale, the baroness's confidant and secretary, is a young man called Šlauko who in his passion and love for the daughter of a coffee merchant, accepts an offer from the secret police to work in the mansion.

SILVESTER LAVRÍK



The Baroness looked hard at the crowd of people which had gathered around the motionless body on the ground. Their voices gradually turned silent and their heads, jauntily held high, slowly fell forwards until their chins touched their chests. The men took off their hats and pressed them to their breasts. One by one the women crossed themselves.

Hemithea the Witch, murmured Major Kirylenko in Russian, staring at the Baroness. It was visible that the passions which the entry of the small woman had stirred both alarmed and fascinated him. Niet, replied the young clerk shaking her head. She is not a witch... She is our baroness, she then added when he asked if the people beneath the window were her former serfs. Afraid she had said too much, she looked hard into his eyes... A landowner, she said, quickly correcting herself. But people always referred to her as the Baroness.

Why?

... they've been taught to.

Are they afraid? he sniggered. They needn't be. We are here now.

I can't explain it better, and she shrugged her shoulders helplessly.

But the Commissar had stopped listening. He walked on ahead and stood next to the Baroness.

What a performance! said Major Kirylenko when he saw the praying crowd gathered around the body. He shook his head in disbelief.

If you're not careful, you can go mad, said the Baroness softly, gazing at the scene below the windows. It's what happened to everyone who tried to understand the true nature of the local community. On the one hand they had a pragmatic faith in progress; on the other an unflinching devotion to everything that could not be rationally explained: an unshaking conviction that the Tatra lakes are connected to the sea; the vision of the Virgin Mary on the nearby Levoča hill; the desire of Hasidic rabbis from Charkov to Krakov to live out their lives here because the grandeur of the country around confers such peace upon the soul it is as if the dead person's remains were resting on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

Busybodies, he murmured in French between clenched teeth, speaking so softly I found myself liking him for a moment. Jeannots, imbeciles!

The Baroness said nothing in reply. She just stood there, so she told me when we went back to those events. She gave no indication how the words of the Bolshevik occupant hurt and offended her. She did not flinch. But at that moment she would have been happiest in a wagon full of Hungarian and German Zipsers, among collaborators being sent into exile, among the defeated of all those regimes which in the last fifty years had done their merciless work. Among her own. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. The Old Testament law had become a founding principle of the new regime and of the decrees issued by the president of the restored Czechoslovak Republic, Eduard Beneš.

So she nodded her head and merely said: It's ok but why must they make such a show of that Gospel of theirs?



SILVESTER LAVRÍK 1964

Photo © Denník N – Tomáš Benedikovič



There are three main things which led me to writing this book, the first being that as a boy I had opportunity to meet the lady it is all about. Later I realized just how special that meeting was and what a mark she had made on me. The second is that I'm from the Spiš region and see the region as being a kind of laboratory of diversity in Central Europe. I've been interested in researching and reviving our historical and cultural heritage for ten or fifteen years now and was looking for someone to write about. Margita Czóbelová struck me as being an ideal subject.

Silvester Lavřík Posledná barónka

Published by: Dixit, Bratislava 2019

453 p.

ISBN: 978-80-896-6229-6

Translation Rights:

booksfromslovakia@litcentrum.sk

Playwright and prose writer, director, artist and occasional journalist, originally a teacher of Slovak and Art, he studied Theatre Directing at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava and later founded and managed the BÁPoDi amateur theatre group. He has also been creative director in an advertising agency, the artistic manager of the town theatre in Zlín as well as director of Radio DEVÍN. His literary debut was a collection of short stories called *Allegro barbaro* (2002), which was followed by other prose works *Thieves* (2005) and *Pen Sketch* (2006), the monodrama *Villa Lola* (2004) and the novels *Zu* (2011) and *Naive Prayers* (2013), some of which were nominated for the prestigious Anasoft Litera Prize. He was awarded the Ján Johánides Prize for his novel *Sunday Chess with Tiso* (2016). He has written more than twenty plays and has recently been focusing on forgotten chapters of Slovak history.

Translated titles:

CZECH

Nedělný šachy s Tisem (Sunday Chess with Tiso)

Argo, Praha, 2019

Zu (Zu)

Větrné mlýny, Brno, 2015

HUNGARIAN

Irina és az ordog (Allegro barbaro, Thieves)

Kalligram, Bratislava, 2010

POLISH

Zu (Zu)

Fundacja na rzecz Kultury

i Edukacji im. Tymoteusza

Karpowicza, 2016

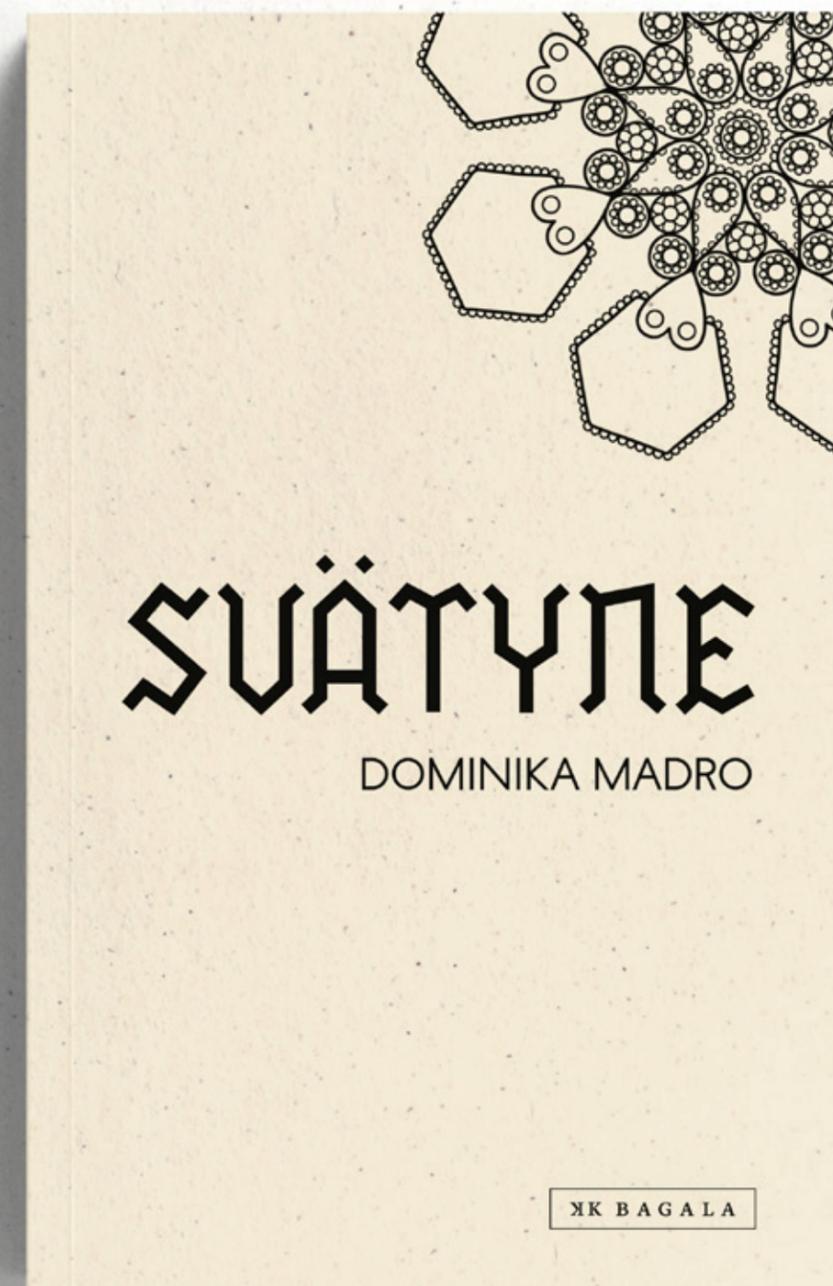


Sanctuaries

LOVE, BIRTH OF NEW LIFE AND THEN DEATH HAVE BEEN CONSTANTS THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF MANKIND. THESE ARE ACCOMPANIED BY JOY AND PAIN, THOUGH THEIR EXACT NATURE IS ALWAYS SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT. THIS CAPTIVATING NARRATIVE PROBES THOSE MOST DEEPLY HIDDEN PAINS CAUSED BY UNFULFILLED MOTHERHOOD AND LOVE.

A tale of two women united by the fact they both help children into the world but whose own desire to become mothers goes unfulfilled. The midwife Višniačka adopts Rodana, a girl rejected by her family, who she initiates into the mysteries of her profession. She never discloses the secret of her life, though, and only at the end does the author reveal it to the reader. The other characters also have secrets, which the author entwines like a cord – an umbilical cord connecting them to the past. This goes right back to the Turkish invasion of the rugged agricultural Myjava region, to the times when people only spoke about the work of midwives in whispers and when many of the things they did were taboo and shrouded in mystique. The author keeps this sense alive through her magical storytelling drawing on ethnological narrative and naturalistic poetry; in their passion, pain, love and cruelty, her characters are wholly contemporary. The strength of emotions and that animality sustaining the continuity of life permeates the atmosphere of ancient tales, vestiges of which remain in the memory of generations.

DOMINIKA MADRO



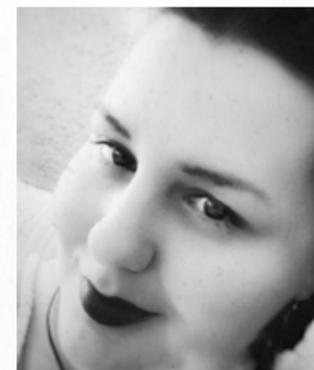
I stand before your raging fever, Bohun, the same woman as she who asked, implored you to believe that I love you more than the pleasure I had of you, more than the idea of our carefree life together. But you did not accept my love, you left it behind you, behind us, to marry Darina, an orphan like yourself and always there behind you. I stand before your fever, the same woman, and that's why I have to tell you: I bore you a son! You sit up in joy. Stillborn. And it knocks you back down. His name, you murmur, wanting to absorb MORE MORE MORE of this living water. My Milovan (the Loved One), I reply, my Milovan, without a life, a christening or a funeral. And I see you grieve, see your stale sweat evaporate. It is only your own huge tears which are cooling your body now. You propose something: Izenka, come here just after midnight, I'll be dead by then, old Hunek will hide our son next to me and quickly nail down the coffin. Drops of holy water will fall on Milovan, too. We will lie together in one coffin, family, together. You finish speaking and I show nothing of myself, not so much as a tear. The silence is broken by some grey-white pigeons which have flown in from somewhere, through the window, perhaps - opened by the force of their bodies. For a while they flap their wings above Bohun's bed, arranged like an emperor's horses. But as soon as Darina bursts in, they settle down on the table one by one. I disappear from there and five pigeons fly behind me, following me like children as far as my home. Višniak is still out in the field somewhere, probably riding Tatár - a horse like a dragon; I slip into my little room, the pigeon wings accompanying me. Milovan is still sleeping softly; I clutch him, the pigeons are above us, at times like a halo, at others like a baldachin, I wait until midnight, we wait until midnight, my son and I, we wait for your father's foretold death, Milovan. A foretelling? What is it? A foretelling is... a great silence, yes, and a great truth in that silence. A foretelling now pulses through our fingertips like a heart. What is a heart? My own Milovan! You probably don't have one! Who knows what tiny body parts you grew inside me in four months but you don't have a heartbeat! At least not yet. Wait until midnight; your father will take you through the earth into a new land. Višniak is chewing meat by the stove; he is merry, drunk and will fall asleep at the table; I will have to take his boots off before morning comes; softly, my son, do not fear, until your funeral, until midnight, you will be here with me; after midnight - if I survive - I will be just a shadow of myself. So we wait until midnight, Višniak is nodding off - the meat and stove have both gone silent, we are waiting for midnight to come; in the dark I can no longer see your face, Milovan! Dear God! Quickly! A candle! Where are you?! I pull one out from under the bed (I don't know what it was doing there), light it and quickly place you, Milovan, under its glow; again I see you, again you are here, thank God. I yell at the pigeons: Stop fluttering! Their wings create a slow but dangerous draught. The candle will burn uninterruptedly till midnight; we will wait until then, you are so peaceful.

Višniak snores like a growling dog preparing to gobble down my heir. Where is that midnight?! We wait! The candle is still not guttering - or have I replaced it with a new one? We are waiting for midnight and our tiredness grows together with our urge to sleep. The darkness is deeper, Milovan is afraid of it. In the coffin? Will it be so dark in there? Will I be there with you? MIDNIGHT!!



DOMINIKA MADRO 1990

Photo © The Author's Archive



... she would rather hold a sword, enter her fantasy world at always the right time, make films and read a lot.

Dominika Madro Svätyne

Published by: Koloman Kertész Bagala

Bratislava 2019, 202 p.

ISBN: 978-80-89973-27-9

Translation Rights:

booksfromslovakia@litcentrum.sk

She was born on the third day of the third month of autumn 1990 in Myjava but would rather have been born after winter somewhere on the Mediterranean. She first studied Slovak language and literature at Comenius University in Bratislava then Drama and Scriptwriting at the famous Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. But she would rather have grown writing like bonsai... Her fantasy ballad about guilt and atonement *The Death of Erlewang's Daughter* was published in the *Fantasy Anthology (2016)* anthology. It tells the story of an old king who wants to gain peace in the afterlife for his daughter and thus goes in search of Baldassarro, a guide to the tombs where she is buried. His quest becomes a passage through purgatory, however, as he is reminded of his old sins which he had swept under a carpet of pride. In 2016 she won the national Short Story Award with her short prose work *Sanctuary*, which she then developed into her debut novel *Sanctuaries (2019)*. She also writes radio plays for children.



Interview with a Cult Member

WHAT HAS MOTIVATED SOME WOMEN TO FOLLOW A ONCE-POPSTAR, NOW CULT FIGURE, TO GO AND LIVE IN A CAMP DEEP IN A FOREST? A NEWS REPORTER GOES TO THEIR SECRET LOCATION TO MEET THE COMMUNITY AND FIND OUT. IN THE FICTITIOUS INTERVIEW WITH A MEMBER OF THE CULT, THE AUTHOR ASKS QUESTIONS ABOUT A WOMAN'S AUTHENTIC EXISTENCE, FREE WILL AND FREEDOM FROM THE CHAINS OF FAMILY AND SOCIETY.

Mária Modrovich is one of those authors who invests the same energy into publishing her works in print and in electronic forms; by doing the latter, she has built up a stable circle of readers who feel an affinity to her themes and textual style. In her latest book, she depicts a purely female community that has formed in a forest around a former cult popstar; away from civilization, these women are almost like the "flower children" of the new millennium only they are not protesting against provincialism, politics – or anything for that matter. Instead, they are just trying to become free, to escape from their families, routine existences and social expectations. In some ways the book can be seen as a revolt against the contemporary wave of cults: the women willingly give up their ambitions, fame, wealth and social status... because only then can they fully be themselves. "Outside you worry the whole day about the effect you make on other people; here you are 100 % answerable only to yourself." The interviews by a reporter with a French-Slovak cult member and community founder known only as N. are a kind of socio-psychological probe into contemporary mechanisms controlling our existences more and more. And the question of whether there exists a solution different from that offered by the community remains unanswered.

MÁRIA MODROVICH

Mária

Modrovich

Rozhovor

s členkou kultu



edícia próza

We are a purely female community, but despite the fact that our 'village' is deliberately isolated, we don't avoid contact with men. A postman comes and we hire men to do jobs around the place. Just don't ask if they have to be ugly so that we are not tempted! Our community is not against men, it is just exclusively female. Our teaching is intended only for women. We don't have anything against men, we just don't want to live with them in traditional relationships, and we reject them as partners. Those people who know about us first make the rational assumption that we are lesbians living in some deviant sexual community. But we live asexually: between us there are no romantic or sexual relations.

...?

I cannot propagate our teaching. I would be breaking the rules. And people without training are not prepared for that kind of information. It could be dangerous to them.

...?

Dangerous both to them and to me. As a member I have to try to be 100% responsible for my existence at all times. Which involves...involves certain acts that are both difficult to explain and that we are not allowed to explain to people outside the community. Twenty-four-hour responsibility for everything I do (and, what is less obvious, for everything that happens to me) is the Holy Grail. To succeed in that 100% is of course an illusion but I must never cease in my attempt to do so.

...?

It is typical that you ask about danger and not about 100% responsibility for one's existence. Responsibility for us people is something very abstract. We either think we are responsible or don't understand why we should be.

Sorry - I don't want to lecture you. Let's go back to the question of danger. Information about the community can be a risk in terms of responsibility. We work at different levels of existence. In order to be able to...travel, for instance, we have to constantly work to achieve absolute responsibility for our existence. For most people that idea's either quite alien or they mistakenly consider it to be like paying off a mortgage or a student loan. But the kind of information we work with may be too much for an untrained person to handle.

...?

Unwanted side effects.

...?

Yes, very funny - like the pill in the Matrix, perhaps, if you're really determined to turn it all into a pop-culture caricature.

You don't want to drop the question of danger, do you Neo? But as you can see, I can talk to you without inhibitions. Nobody is spying on me. I'm free and have just as much freedom as responsibility - there is a direct correlation between the two. No-one is forcing me into anything or policing me. Don't you believe me?



MÁRIA MODROVICH 1977

Photo © Marika Majorová



There were times when I was genuinely unhappy – especially when I was trying to meet demands placed on me from outside. Adapting to long-term social pressure...is one of the most depressing modes of existence.

One of the so-called 'expat' authors who started to publish in the new millennium after the fall of the Iron Curtain allowed young people from the Eastern bloc to travel abroad and experience new cultures first-hand. In all four books she has written so far, she has been inspired by her long-term stays abroad (Australia, USA). In her short story collection *Lu & Mira* (2011), she draws both from tales of friends at home and abroad as well as from her own experience. In the novel *Silent Mode* (2013), she tells two simultaneous stories about a love affair between Helena and Miky, a New Yorker, and about her being stalked by a virtual observer. In this work, she tries to penetrate the psychological processes of both the stalker and the victim. *Flashback* (2017) is a collection of ten stories depicting the female narrator's struggle to find her own identity.

Mária Modrovich
Rozhovor s členkou kultu

Published by: Vlna, Bratislava 2019

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booksfromslovakia@litcentrum.sk

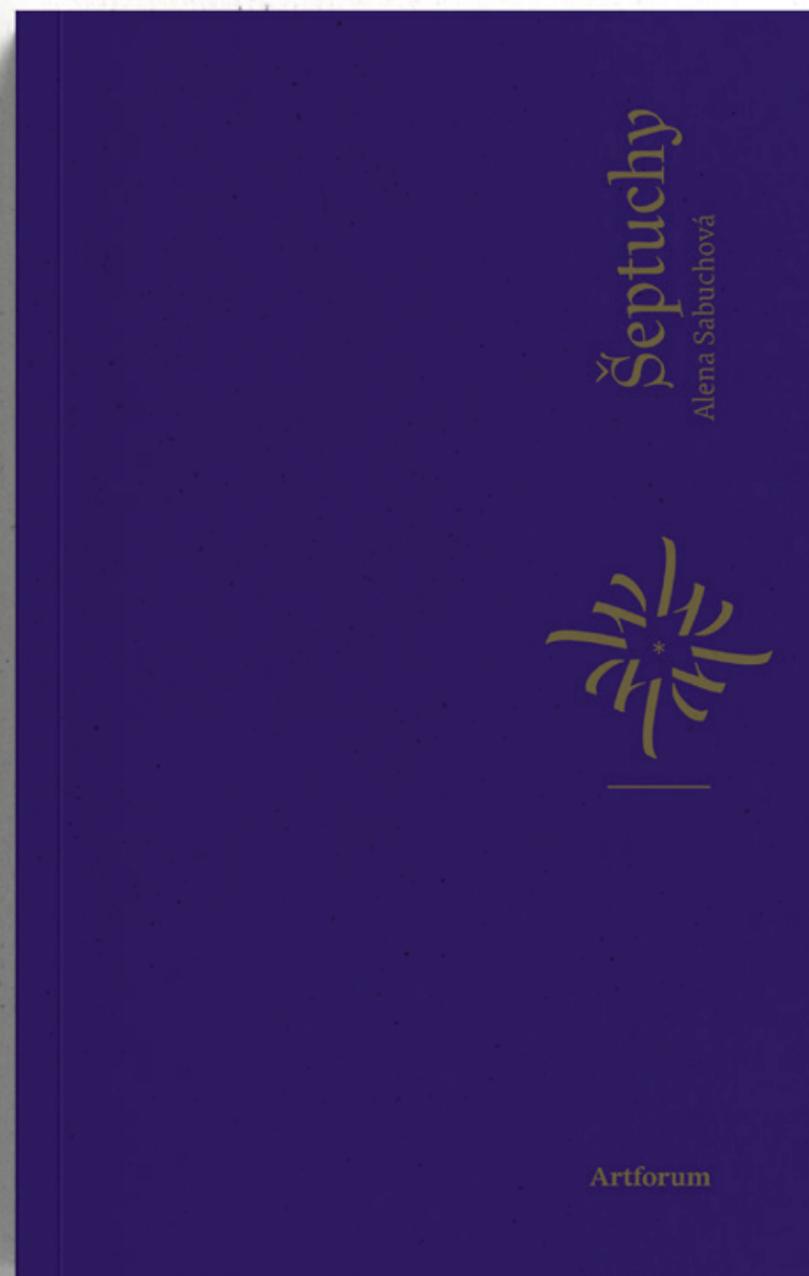


The Whisperers

EVEN NOW THE MISTY PODLACHIA REGION IS STILL SHROUDED IN LEGENDS. AT FIRST SIGHT, SOME PEOPLE THERE SEEM VERY STRANGE, WITH THEIR OWN FAITH, MISERY AND WHISPERERS: WOMEN WHO HEAL BY WHISPERING.

Dorota, daughter of the local gravedigger, is taking in the world around her; with all its complex interpersonal relations, neglect and beauty, supernature and harsh reality, with whisperers who know how to treat sick people (or perhaps don't, but are believed to). This tale of Dorota growing up in a magical region where the borders of Poland, Belarus and Lithuania meet is told by her best friend. The theme of borders and whether or not we can cross them is as recurrent as the refrain of a 1990s hit on MTV. And here the world of the living merges with that of the dead, Christian piety with the pagan tradition of healing whispers, modern Western culture with local folklore. The novel's female characters are driven by an incessant desire to leave, to cross the border, to free themselves. But wherever they go, they take their experience of life on the periphery with them.

ALENA SABUCHOVÁ



Different Polish television companies came to Hajnówka and some of the surrounding village – we were in the main news. It had soon got around, you see: a toilet on the road and a fatal car crash. And people were quite happy speculating in front of the camera.

“We think it was her from Opaka.”

“It was definitely the one from Istok, she ordered them to do it.”

“They said such things were done by the sorceress from Kaniuki.”

“It was the one from Grabowiec...”

The official police report stated that the driver had lost control of the vehicle because of an unexpected object on the road – a toilet. It suddenly appeared in front of him in the dark and he couldn't brake in time.

There were some, though, who said that he was going too fast and that it was his fault regardless of whether someone had left a toilet on the road or not.

The reporter went to the batushka to ask what he thought of it and whether other people had been killed locally by toilets on the road. The mayor of Hajnówka was asked the same question. He had put on a suit and swore on his soul that he knew nothing about such practices.

“I have heard that some people are interested in this craft but never come across it personally.” Elzbieta and her grandmother were sitting in front of the television.

“He'd lie till he was blue in the face.”

“We think it was just an unfortunate accident and certainly nothing which can be attributed to any local traditions. We are just finishing a health centre and will soon be getting a new ambulance.”

The batushka grew as indignant as he sometimes did during the liturgy.

“The Orthodox Church categorically distances itself from any kind of sorcery. Here such hocus-pocus has achieved nothing apart from becoming the means by which a human life was lost.”

It is hard to see an old bog in the middle of a road as black magic but he was actually right.

One of the whisperers had advised the following as a means of solving family feuds about who inherits what: a toilet should be placed in the middle of the road, doused in petrol and then set on fire. But whoever was responsible had not managed the last part of the task. And he or she was never found nor admitted to the deed.

It was talked about for a long time afterwards. And, as is customary in such cases, people came up with their own versions and blamed whoever they thought fit to blame. It was like with the burnt-out chapel in Ból – everyone seemed to know exactly who had done it.



ALENA SABUCHOVÁ 1989

Photo © Denník N – Vladimír Šimíček



I admit that at the beginning I somewhat romanticized it, imagining it as a region of forests and marshes where women live in wooden cottages and heal people with whispers. I intuitively felt there was a story there. I told myself it would be great to go and discover the place. And when I arrived there the first time, I knew I had to go back.

Author and scriptwriter with a passion for stories, visual art and good food, all of which she is willing to walk or even run long distances for, she studied Film and Television Scriptwriting and Dramaturgy at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. Her literary debut, collection of short stories *Rooms in the Back* won her the Ivan Krasko Award as well as the Tatra banka Foundation Prize in the Young Author category. Thanks to her second book, *The Whisperers*, she has grown to love Podlachia – a region which no-one could dream up. The novel was shortlisted for the Anasoft Litera Prize 2020, Slovakia's most famous literary award.

Alena Sabuchová *Šeptuchy*

Published by: Artforum, Bratislava 2019

192 p.

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Nothing Happened

A PERFORMANCE ABOUT INFIDELITY, ABOUT TODAY'S THIRTY-SOMETHINGS ADDICTED TO THEIR SMARTPHONES AND ANTI-STRESS YOGA, ABOUT CREATING ALTERNATIVE IDENTITIES AND ABOUT FREE WILL. ABOUT WHAT REMAINS IN THE EVENING WHEN A PERSON FINISHES SCROLLING DOWN.

An intimate confession in the form of a monodrama combined with a penetrating study of the world around us. Motherhood, isolation, infidelity, evenings with one's father drinking wine to serve as alibis, a reduction of social life to an online environment which ultimately ends up on a psychologist's couch – all are enacted by one performer interacting closely with her audience. Amongst whom sits a man who knows the woman on stage, recollects their relationship and tries to find out what she is trying to achieve by inviting him there. This lively and dynamically-written book uncovers not only what we hide from others but also what we hide from ourselves.

ZUZANA ŠMATLÁKOVÁ

zuzana šmatláková

nič sa nestalo



MARENČIN PT

(earnestly) "Listen, Mum phoned me and that brother of mine - "

She shakes his head, breathes in, breathes out.

"You don't finish because you see he is in no state to listen and understand what you're saying - he is looking past you... So you leave him to go and wash dishes and find yourself some activity to do in another room until he falls asleep..."

She waves her mobile around in front of her.

"...and you creep into the bedroom when he is already heavily breathing. "

She smacks her lips twice.

"And then it's morning, he'll go off to work and the playground awaits you, dreams of conception, a breast massage and lost toys and then a phonecall to your parents or brother, or you have to go somewhere in person. It is somehow getting on top of you - and what will you do?"

(serious expression) "I'm really asking: what will you do?"

She goes on staring straight ahead.

"What does a modern woman do in such a situation? Unattached, independent. With ties..."

She waits.

As do we.

She unblocks the mobile, hovers round for a while, she aims it at the ground in front of her and pulls the trigger. You can hear the click.

She is tapping on the mobile with total concentration.

She finishes, turns off the display with her index finger and looks at the audience. Her face is bathed in light now; she's pale and is giving the merest hint of a smile.

She speaks slowly but so everyone can hear: "She takes a photo of her breakfast and puts it up on Instagram."

The audience laugh. Someone - perhaps three people sitting in different places even clap. I laugh with them.

"Or an even greater extreme. "

She crosses the stage and goes up to the wooden pallets on which a light is now shining again.

She stands the mobile up against the wooden wall, gets down on all fours and sets something up on it. Then for a moment she looks at the screen, moves the phone slightly and then stands up quickly before running to the middle of the stage: in the cone of light, she leans forward to touch the ground with her hands and then raise one leg up high - to my mind it should be even higher - and then waits in that position. Then the self-timer goes off several times.

When the mobile has finished taking pictures, she stands up, straightens her black t-shirt and walks over to the wall of pallets. She picks up the mobile, sighs noisily and looks through the photos.

"It is hard to choose just one to post," she says.

The audience laugh so loud, she (typically) has to really work hard not to burst out laughing herself.

She goes on pressing buttons for a moment, photoshopping perhaps.

The audience are watching her in suspense. Occasionally someone titters.

At the moment when the joke seems to be wearing thin, she turns off the display and strides across the stage.



**ZUZANA
ŠMATLÁKOVÁ
1988**

Photo © Ladislav Pálmai



In writing this story about infidelity, I wanted to touch on the question of free will - my main character is constantly asking who or what led her to cheat on her husband but to feel no guilt in doing so. I realize that the problem of free will is a complex one going far beyond our everyday experience but it was interesting for me to look at this phenomenon here and now. During a time when our senses are constantly being attacked by so many different impulses it is often very difficult to work out what lies behind even the most banal decisions which we make.

**Zuzana Šmatláková
Nič sa nestalo**

Published by: Marenčin PT,

Bratislava 2020

128 p.

ISBN: 978-80-569-0446-6

Translation Rights:

booksfromslovakia@litcentrum.sk

Prose writer and illustrator, Zuzana Šmatláková did a doctorate in literature and later taught for a year at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, South Korea. She is a four-time finalist in the Short Story Award and author of the *Exit* (2013) short story collection, for which she won the Tatra banka Foundation Prize in the Young Author category. Her book has also been published in Romanian and individual texts from it translated into several other languages.

Translated titles:

ROMANIAN

Exit (Exit)

Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca, 2016

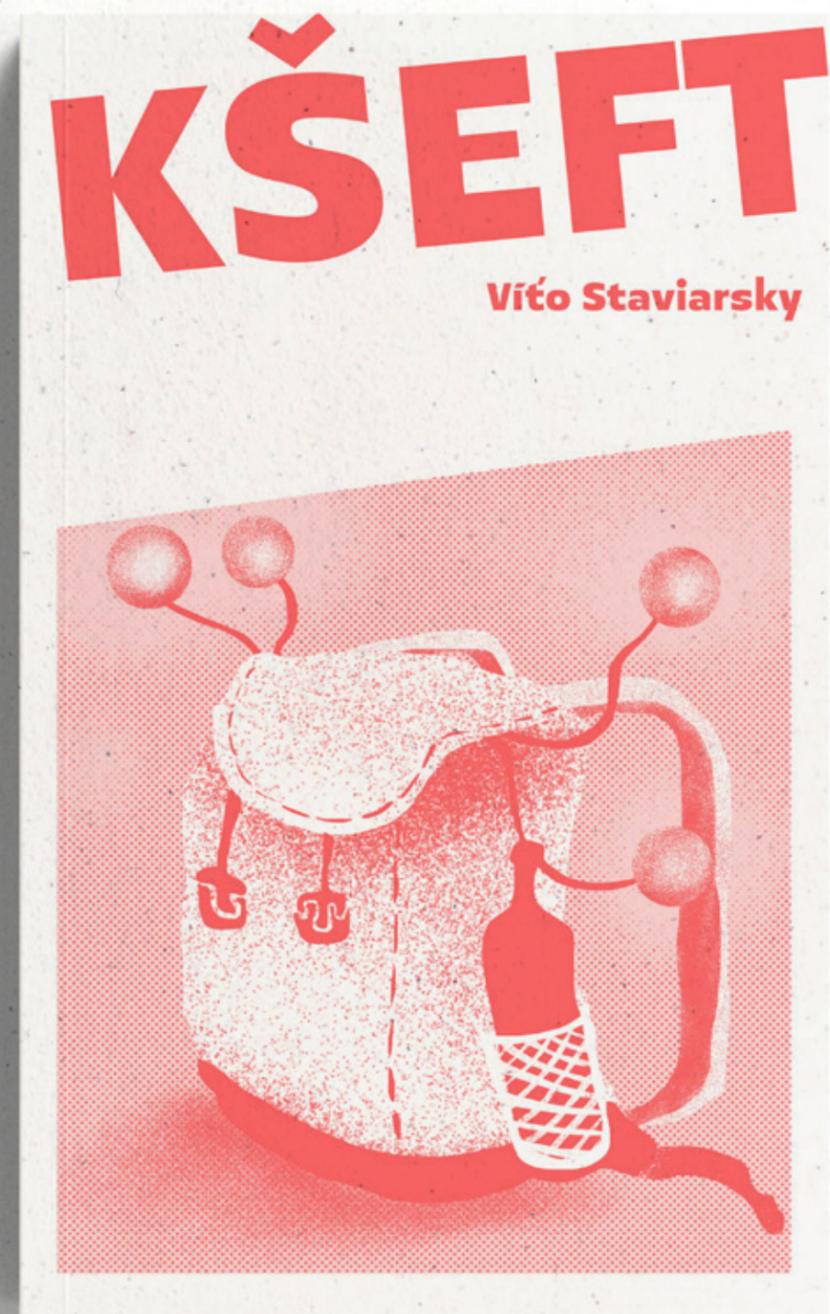


The Deal

ENTER A WORLD OF OUTDOOR MARKETS, MERRY-GO-ROUNDS AND TINSEL. IN *THE DEAL* YOU WILL FIND SHORT WITTY TEXTS INSPIRED BY THE EXPERIENCES OF A STALLHOLDER AS WELL AS THE STORIES *MARK'S DAUGHTER* AND *LOLI PARADIČKA*, BOTH OF WHICH OFFER REALISTIC, LIGHT AND ENTERTAINING GLIMPSES INTO THE SAME WORLD.

Bubble blowers and flashy tinsel are not very important for most people but for Staviarsky's characters, travelling market traders, they are their bread and butter and livelihood. Staviarsky has a very distinctive, easily identifiable style with short, incisive sentences and careful use of slang and colloquialisms. He can empathize with people on the periphery, intimately knows the Roma ethnicity and has a filmmaker's precise grasp of material which enables him to write about both small and big problems.

VÍŤO STAVIARSKY



As soon as I had finished unpacking, it started to rain. So I put everything back in the car and went for a coffee. And then a storm started and everyone ran to one of the nearby pubs. I went into one and at a table opposite sat an old acquaintance of mine – we had known each other since childhood. He was there with a friend and motioned me to sit down. What was I drinking? I said I was driving and just wanted some juice. “Where are you going to drive to in weather like this?” he asked. And he ordered a vodka for himself and his friend.

“You in business?” he asked with a smile. He had probably seen me loading the goods into the car. I shrugged my shoulders – I didn’t want to talk about it... But what can you do when it is raining outside and you’re stuck in a pub somewhere?... I asked him how he was just to be polite and keep the conversation going – he had invited me to join him, after all. Fine, he said. He had happily remarried and strongly recommended me do the same: get rid of the old wife and find a new one, he said. It gave a man a new lease of life. If he’d not done it, he’d be pushing up the daisies by now...

It was tiring to listen to him. I mean in a way he was right. I had been married for years but hoped he wouldn’t ask about details. I don’t like talking about such things. You feel like a loser. My friend ordered another vodka for himself and his colleague. He wanted to get me one too but again I refused.

“So what are you having?” he asked. I had my juice, but was drinking it slowly because it was so sour.

I found out my friend had a seven-year-old son. A new marriage in his fifties had kickstarted him. He decided he would be successful.

“You used to work in a textile plant, if I remember right,” I said, though I couldn’t really give a damn.

After the revolution he went into business, making work clothes, overalls, trousers, blouses, gloves, whatever people needed for work so that they didn’t get dirty. In the 90s, he had a market stall and we sometimes used to meet. But that was ages ago. At first he didn’t do so well but then he found new customers – Germans, Hungarians, Czechs. And then he started to export his stuff, sometimes even to Africa.

“Does anyone work there?” I asked as an aside.

It was pouring it down, there were flashes of lightning and I was wondering if I would sell anything that day. Would listening to tittle-tattle about overalls be my main activity that day? I hoped not.

As the waiter went past, my friend pulled his sleeve and ordered another vodka though he’d still not drunk his previous one. He wanted to order me one, too, but again I refused. “I’ll have a coffee,” I said though I had already drunk one. But the rain was making me yawn. I realized my friend had quite an audience. They had come in from the rain and were silently listening to his stories. Not that they had any option. Perhaps they’d have happily changed the topic but my friend was a loudmouth and would have ruthlessly drowned them out.



VÍTO STAVIARSKY 1960

Photo © Mária Staviarska



I don’t tackle metaphysical problems nor give my characters anything extra. Why would I? Should a writer from East Slovakia like me try to carry on like a Parisian intellectual? It wouldn’t be appropriate. A text should run like a film and not stop for the sake of such arty-farty stuff.

Víto Staviarsky Kšeft

Published by: Staviarsky
production, Prešov 2019

176 p.

ISBN: 978-80-973379-0-2

Translation Rights:

booksfromslovakia@litcentrum.sk

Scriptwriter, film-maker and writer. He received the Anasoft Litera Prize 2013 with his book *Kale topanky*. His romantic film comedy *Loli paradička* achieved great success both with critics and the viewing public.

Translated titles:

CROATIAN

Crne cipele (Kale topanky)

Hena com, Zagreb, 2018

HUNGARIAN

Fekete cipők fehér fűzovel

(Kale topanky)

Noran Libro, Budapest, 2016

POLISH

Wytrzeźwiałka (Kivader)

Pogranicze, Sejny, 2014

SLOVENIAN

Kivader in druge novele

(Kale topanky)

Zložba Zala, Maribor, 2018

UKRAINIAN

Burudni čerevyky (Kale topanky)

Poligrafcentr Lira, Uzhorod, 2014





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