

"A BOOK MUST BE THE AXE FOR THE FROZEN SEA WITHIN US". FRANZ KAFKA

BOOK WORLD PRAGUE 24

29TH INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR AND LITERARY FESTIVAL
GUEST OF HONOUR: DAS BUCH – GERMAN-LANGUAGE LITERATURE

23—26 MAY 2024
PRAGUE EXHIBITION
GROUNDS

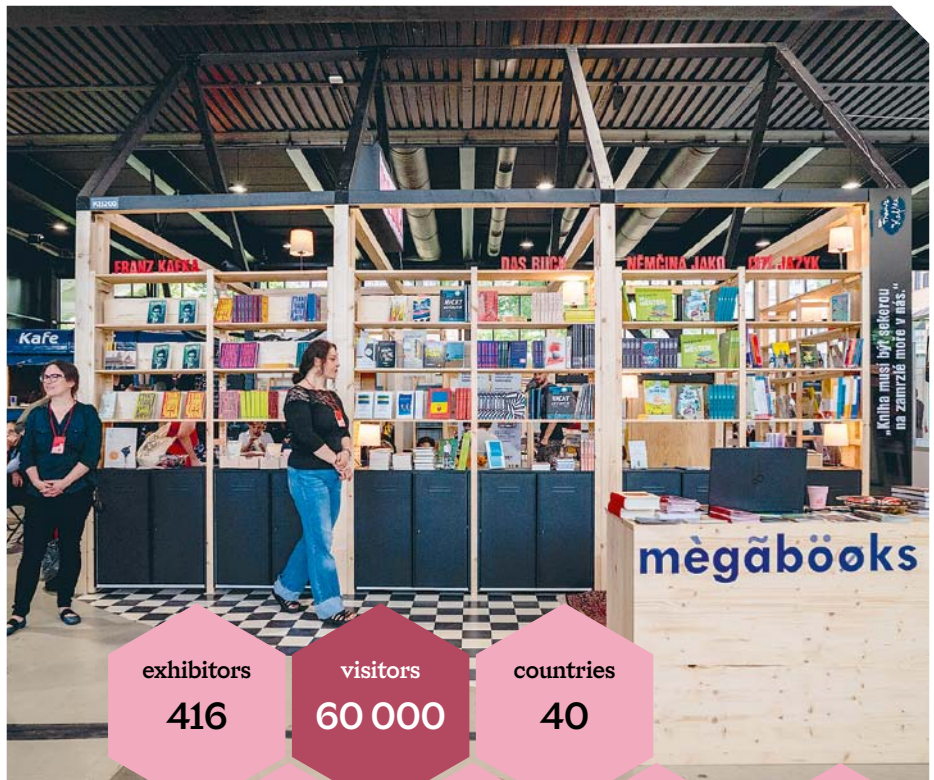
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Book World Prague 2024

The programme of the 29th International Book Fair and Literary Festival Book World Prague reflected the centenary of the death of Franz Kafka. Which is why this year's guest of honour was the traditional festival project of Das Buch entitled for the 2024 edition Das Buch – German-Language Literature. It presented authors and speakers from Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

The programme commemorating Kafka's anniversary featured his work and the sources of inspiration it provided. The legacy of the Prague-based writer who wrote in German was also reflected in the visuals as well as in the motto of the event, which was Kafka's quote: "A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us." Apart from the literature of German-speaking countries, the festival continued with its programme supporting young readers. The well-established section entitled Literature as the Voice of Freedom provided space for those who cannot speak freely and yet again resonated with the current social and political situation in the world, as did the programme of Ukrainian literature, which continues to help Ukrainian refugees maintain contact with their language and literature. The Jiří Theiner Award, which is awarded to those fighting against censorship and for democracy, was awarded remotely to Elif Şafak.

The 29th International Book Fair and Literary Festival Book World Prague held at the Prague Exhibition Grounds from Thursday 23 May to Sunday 26 May attracted about 60,000 readers.



exhibitors

416

visitors

60 000

countries

40

stands

212

programmes

482

exhibitions

11

participants

804



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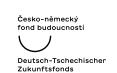
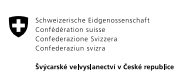
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THE 2ND CEE BOOK MARKET

The Central and East European Book Market, held in the Bohemia Pavilion as part of the International Book Fair and Literary Festival Book World Prague, brought together 100 foreign and domestic professionals from the book sector.

This edition took into account the guests of honour of Book World Prague, i.e. German-speaking countries, both by a significant representation of publishers from these countries (30 in total) and by involving experts from these countries in specialized discussions. The goal was to reflect on the current situation on the book market in German-speaking countries in relation to the CEE market.

During the two main panel discussions, *Building Bridges: Exploring Intercultural Dialogue in Publishing and Bibliodiversity and Slow Publishing*, but also during the round table discussions, very similar examples were mentioned, i.e. examples of the obstacles these markets face or of the accomplishments and efficient schemes where literature helps to bridge differences, connect people and raise awareness of sensitive issues.

For the first time, the festival introduced the Book-to-Screen concept, which is already a regular feature of international festivals and fairs. The discussion was moderated by Niki Théron from Frankfurter Buchmesse and its participants included film producer Vratislav Šlajer and Frauke Kniffler, a German publishing house editor with experience in selling rights to film adaptations of books.

Given the high participation of publishers of children's books, a debate was also held in cooperation with the Czech Literary Centre on the production of children's literature in CEE



in relation to the global market, with representatives of both large and small publishing houses from the Czech Republic and abroad commenting on the topic.

The business part of the programme, dedicated to B2B meetings, was particularly successful. These were organised in two afternoon blocks, during which pre-arranged meetings of individual publishers and agents took place. Once again, personal contact has proved to be vital. Editors and translators as well as representatives of cultural institutions and the media also expressed interest in the meetings. The meetings were very productive, and in some countries work is already starting on new translations.

There was plenty of time for relaxed professional conversation and exchange of opinions during the remainder of the programme, which was welcomed by the guests, many of whom had already promised to attend next year.

The CEE Book Market thus fulfilled its mission of serving as a platform for meeting, ex-

THE CZECH REPUBLIC AS THE GUEST OF HONOUR AT THE FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR 2026



Czech literature had symbolically set sail towards the Frankfurt Book Fair, where it will be the guest of honour in 2026.

The accompanying programme of last year's Book World Prague, prepared by the Czech Literary Centre together with the Moravian Library, therefore focused on presenting leading domestic authors and strengthening cooperation with publishers from German-speaking countries. In Prague, book industry professionals from Germany, Austria and Switzerland learned about the current Czech book production and met Czech publishers, literary agents and translators.

"It is important for us to emphasize the importance of the Central European area on our way to Frankfurt. Czech literature and the Czech book market are largely influenced by this phenomenon. It is therefore logical that we used this emphasis as the basis for our professional programme"

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changing experiences and trading in foreign rights, which is an inherent part of a major international fair. At the same time, the initiative has clearly moved forward and gained the attention of a wide professional public in the field of book culture across Europe.

IT IS GOOD WHEN WE READ ABOUT EACH OTHER

Leading Slovak writer **SILVESTER LAVRÍK** and Hungarian author **PÁL ZÁVADA** together with translators **EVA ANDREJČÁKOVÁ** and **TÜNDE MÉSZÁROS** met for a debate on 'Dealing with the Past in Contemporary Visegrad Literature'. The debate was hosted by Aleksander Kaczorowski.

"We deal with the problem of fragmented society. Do you think that authors play a greater role at a time like this? That literature should speak more?" asked Aleksander Kaczorowski at the beginning of the debate. "A writer tries to depict the way we live, the way we want to live, and is responsible for what words he or she uses and how they affect those who read them. Reckless and irresponsible use of words in the public space has actually gotten us to the situation we are currently experiencing," said Silvester Lavřík. "I don't want to educate anyone with my books, but if my words initiate a discussion in society, I am of course happy," added Pál Závada. The translator of his books, Eva Andrejčáková, mentioned that Závada's book *Jadviga párnája* [Yadviga's Pillow], which describes the life and problems of a Slovak village in Hungary in the 20th century, and which was published in the turbulent 1990s, already caused a great deal of discussion. "It was an era marked by national passions and the book appeared as a light in the morass of that time. Each of Pál's books touches on issues that we haven't dealt with historically yet." Sil-



vester Lavřík admitted that for him too *Jadviga párnája* was a pillow during the tedious years. "It was a great experience," he said, adding that Pál Závada, whose writing is straddling Hungary and Slovakia, proves how similar the two countries are. "I'm glad that we can consider him a bit our writer," said Silvester Lavřík. Pál Závada went on to say that in our region we are dealing with similar problems and it is good to read about each other, to get to know each other better. "We know why we should read authors who come from our region. We really need to know more about each other," added Tünde Mészáros, translator of Silvester Lavřík's books, and continued with the topic of translations of Hungarian and Slovak books. "Silvester's book *Nedělné šachy s Tisom* [Sunday Chess with Tiso] was a big hit. It is good that books like that get translated," she

said. The book tells the story of a girl who was personally acquainted with the former Slovak president Tiso, a politician who collaborated with the Nazis. In the background of the main plot, we perceive the life and mood of the society at that time. But in general, books from the Visegrad countries have yet to find their way to the world market. They are not translated as much as they deserve, even though the situation has somewhat improved recently. This may also be due to the fact that the problems that our region has solved and is dealing with are becoming known through the media, and even readers from more distant countries perceive the historical context and are interested in the issue and, consequently, in the literature that deals with historical events. The saying that literature unites is true here, too.

TEN HEROINES WHO FLED THE WAR IN UKRAINE INSPIRE WITH THEIR STORIES

On her way through Prague, **OKSANA MASLOVA** overheard a conversation between two people on the tram. An unknown passenger was sending all the Ukrainians home, saying that they were just trouble and nobody wanted them here. The man opposite him objected. *“That made me look for more information. I found out that in 2022, when the Czech Republic accepted the largest number of refugees from Ukraine, these immigrants returned 8 billion Czech crowns to the Czech budget,”* said the writer at the beginning of the debate. That conversation inspired her book **Phoenixes from Ukraine** which describes the lives of Ukrainian women in the Czech Republic.

“Most refugees were women with children. I became interested in who they were, how it was possible that they learned a new language in a year and moved from the position of war refugees to the position of someone who returns money to the budget,” explained Oksana Maslova. She interviewed around 200 women and selected ten of them for her book. Six of them introduced themselves during the debate.

The author said that after having arrived in the Czech Republic she had a compelling feeling to be useful. She created a Telegram channel to share practical information about life in the Czech Republic. Information originally intended only for friends grew in popularity. And the ten women concerned were among the subscribers. *“My own story is not important for the book. The book focuses on women who managed to prove themselves for example in a scientific laboratory, on the stage or in architecture,”* added Maslova.

“I hope that our stories will motivate other Ukrainians who live here, so that they feel worthy and are not afraid to speak up or to ask for something,” said singer Olga, one of the heroines of **Phoenixes from Ukraine**. She said that she enjoys her life in the Czech Republic very much.

“I work in a school with children who are around 12 years old,” explained Anna, another



of the heroines, *“sometimes they ask me how I know English when I’m from Ukraine. I would like this book to show people that a Ukrainian woman does not automatically mean a cleaner. We are educated, intelligent and we manage to continue pursuing our original careers here.”*

All the women thanked for the support they received with moving and settling in. They would like the book to reach and possibly inspire as many Ukrainians as possible. According to them, it could show Czech readers a non-stereotypical view of the Ukrainians fleeing the war. *“In addition to the stories, the book also contains a chapter on what to do when nothing can be done. It contains the recipes of our heroines for difficult life situations – and not only when fleeing the war,”* added Oksana Maslova.

In conclusion, the heroines emphasized the need to find inner motivation in challenging situations to keep going. And if the person fails to do so, he or she should not be afraid to ask for help – from a therapist for instance – or even to use some antidepressants. *“I don’t have as much inner strength as these heroines, but the fact that we’re sitting here is proof of what can be done when you put your mind to it,”* the writer concluded.

TESTIMONY OF A POET WHO IS TERRIFIED BY WHAT IS HAPPENING

“Two years ago, a large Belarusian delegation attended Book World Prague. We had our stand here and many different meetings. I reckon that this year, I am the only one representing Belarus. Belarus seems to have disappeared from the political scene. But the tragedy of Belarus continues. I am grateful that, thanks to the friends from the Arnošt Lustig Fund, I can bring attention to this tragedy,” said Belarusian poet and dissident **DMITRIJ STROTSEV** at the beginning of the discussion.

The author described how circumstances led him to write a poetic reportage. He has been writing poetry for more than 40 years. He used to write complex metaphorical poems that took many months or even years to create. It was important for him to hear the right words. But between 2000 and 2010, the Russian army invaded Georgia, and European events were set in motion. *“I realised*

that this complex way of writing was no longer suitable. And that I needed to express myself from within the event when I don’t have time to look for beautiful words. At that point the internet opened up and I had the opportunity to publish. When we started going to demonstrations in Belarus in 2020, I would come home all shaken and immediately write down my impressions,” Strotsev described.

Then in the evening he would publish poems on Facebook. And in the morning, he found out that they had already been translated into several languages and shared around the world. He also pointed out that this is not the testimony of a journalist, but the testimony of a poet who is terrified by what is happening. His new book entitled **Poetic Reportage** draws on these experiences.

The poet briefly described the difficult situation in Belarus at the moment. He says that he

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at Book World Prague, building on the partnerships we have already established and trying to broaden them with partnerships with German, Swiss and Austrian publishers. And it seems to me, at least according to the feedback we have received, that the meeting will result in new translations of Czech books,” says **TOMÁŠ KUBÍČEK**, Director of the Moravian Library, which is responsible for the guesting of the Czech Republic at the Frankfurt Book Fair.

Meetings within the Professional Forum focused on translation and self-publishing were a key part of the accompanying programme at Book World Prague. Several debates were devoted directly to the Czech Republic being the guest of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair (FBM) in 2026. Leading authors such as Radka Denemarková, Petr Hruška, Bianca Bellová or Jan Němec discussed their work and the possibilities of our presentation abroad.

One of the topics was also the work of translators. A part of the programme thus focused on how to translate children’s books from one language to another in such a way to keep humour, playfulness and tension. In the same block, there was also a debate between representatives of foreign institutions from the RECIT network (European literary translation centres network) and a presentation of ARCHIPELAGOS, a project to support translators in the role of literary scouts, in which the Czech Literary Centre is also involved as a partner institution.

As part of the preparations for the aforementioned guesting of the Czech Republic at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2026 and on the occasion of the presentation of German-language literature at this year’s Book World Prague, the Czech Literary Centre invited twenty-two representatives from seventeen publishing houses to Prague in cooperation with FBM and publishers’ unions from Switzerland and Austria. The invitation was accepted by a total of seven publishing houses from Germany (Aviva, Ceeolpress, Hanser Kinder- und Jugendbuchverlag, Kiwi, Reproduct, Suhrkamp, Voland und Quist), five from Austria (Achse Verlag, Czernin Verlag, Jugendbuchverlag, Leykam, Picus) and five from Switzerland (Diogenes, Geparden, Helvetiq, Kommode, Nordsüd).

Source: Czech Literary Centre – Moravian Library

often has to explain that his country is also occupied today. The terror that the criminal government is committing against its own people would not be possible without the approval of the Russian government. *“Tens of thousands of people are in prison, hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to leave the country. Thousands of Belarusians have joined the Ukrainian army to fight for freedom. And we put our hope in the liberation of the Ukrainians,”* said Dmitrij Strotsev.

The poet currently lives in exile in Berlin. This is a very personal test for him because he loves his country very much. However, he managed to found a publishing house and publish fifteen books by Belarusian authors. He makes the books himself by hand, based on a pre-order.

Dmitrij Strotsev performed several of his poems in Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian.

COMPLETELY KAFKA

Completely Kafka is a book by Austrian comic writer **NICOLAS MAHLER** introducing Franz Kafka and his work in a unique way. Writer **JAROSLAV RUDIŠ** and translator **MICHAELA ŠKULTÉTY** helped the author present the book at the fair.

The meeting of the three interesting people took place under the umbrella of the guest of honour of the fair, the Das Buch project, and was therefore conducted in both German and Czech. The programme was hosted in Czech and German by Jaroslav Rudiš who himself writes in both languages. He and Nicolas Mahler have already worked together. "We made the comic book *Nachtgestalten* together which is about a Prague pub crawl. It was published in German first, then in Czech and several other languages," said Jaroslav Rudiš. Their cooperation grew into friendship. "We go out for schnitzel in Vienna," they both laughed. *Completely Kafka* is a very specific work. It is a slim book which depicts Kafka's life and work through quotations, excerpts from books, letters and Nicolas' comic drawings. "The book was published last November, that is even before the beginning of 'Kafka's year'. You'd



Nicolas Mahler, Jaroslav Rudiš

expect there would be a lot of publications for his anniversary. But I was the first," laughed Nicolas. "I had to study Kafka's texts, journals, many resources. It was quite challenging. But I found several interesting things. For example, the fact that he and Max Brod decided to write a bestseller just so Kafka could escape boring office work. They also planned to publish cheap guidebooks listing the cheapest pubs and hotels in the region. From their letters, it's clear that they really wanted to pursue this idea." Translator Michaela Škultéty then

had to tackle a rather difficult translation because the sentences were taken out of context. "I searched for the quotations used in the text in Czech translations. Most of Kafka's works have multiple translations, so I tried to choose the best one. For example, Kafka's letter to his father was once translated starting with "Dear Dad" and once with "Dear Father". Since Kafka didn't have a warm relationship with his father, I chose the second one. It took a lot of time." People may not know that Kafka also drew, so a comic book about his life might have pleased him. "His artwork is available, and some new drawings have appeared. A few motifs inspired me," admitted Nicolas Mahler.

All three speakers then pondered, among other things, why Kafka is still read, why his work still has something to say. "Because it's something completely different from other literature. If we are looking for the meaning or meaninglessness of this world, we can find it in Kafka," said Michaela Škultéty. "For me, Kafka has an incredible mood, he knows how to project life into literature," said Jaroslav Rudiš and Nicolas Mahler added a funny story, "I visit schools a lot, and I was amused when a student asked me why he had to read Kafka's work when he himself wanted to destroy it because he didn't think it was good." Fortunately, his work survived and we can remember it also thanks to the book *Completely Kafka*.

BOOK IS AN ORGANIC MEDIUM

Swiss writer **PETER STAMM**, Belgian philologist and writer **STEFAN HERTMANS** and **GUILLAUME BASSET**, Dramaturg of Book World Prague, reflected on the quote by Franz Kafka and the motto of this edition of the fair, "A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us", in a programme entitled "Between the Hammer and the Axe".

The main point for discussion was whether rather than using Kafka's axe the writer is the one using Nietzsche's hammer, the one who patiently examines the past, the backstage, the illusions of relationships and their secrets.

"In my opinion the meaning of Kafka's quote is a harsh metaphor. It says that you have to break the ice in people to get to their hearts. And you can achieve that by a book," said Peter Stamm.

Guillaume Basset then asked whether writing could be a way to dive deep within oneself. "Certainly. Whenever I learned anything about the world, it was through literature. It is the best way to get to know yourself and the world," added Peter Stamm. "I think that every book is basically a kind of analysis of ourselves, the authors," joined the debate Stefan Hertmans.

Guillaume Basset wondered if the two authors present agreed that a writer might be surprised by what he or she had written. Peter Stamm replied that it was those moments, when he came up with the idea to spin a story in another way than what he had originally intended, that he enjoyed the most. "Once, I let the main characters die after the first third of the book. I thought why not and went for it. But it wasn't my initial idea." Stefan Hertmans added that many people think that writers manipulate their characters but that it's not the case. "Once I realised that, I felt free." Guillaume Basset asked the two authors another question, namely how they know when the book is finished, when there is nothing that can be improved? "I don't think that it's ever

finished," replied Peter Stamm. "It continues living its own life once it is published." Another question was: Which book did for you what Kafka suggests in his quote? Peter Stamm chose *The Stranger* by Albert Camus and Stefan Hertmans mentioned Rainer Maria Rilke. It was also discussed whether any of the books written by the present authors elicited a reaction from the readers in the spirit of Kafka's quote, that is, whether the story touched them in such a way that it "broke their inner ice"? "One woman wrote me that she divorced her husband based on my book because she realised what was wrong with their relationship. Not that I would wish divorce on anybody but in this case the book helped this woman, it freed her," remembered Peter Stamm. Stefan Hertmans added a story about how a book he wrote based on his grandfather's World War I journal inspired a reader, whose grandfather had also fought in World War I, to research his past. "He found his journal and you won't believe it but my grandfather actually saved his grandfather. He told me that if it wasn't for my grandfather, he wouldn't be here. That was a powerful moment."

An interesting question was raised, namely whether "the book's voice" remains even after it is translated? Whether it is not lost? "I'm happy that so many books get translated but I'm not that keen on communicating with the translators. However, we do have to stay in touch," said Peter Stamm. "I respect the translators very much. Whenever they contact me, they have many questions, they may be interested in the dialect or various details. They definitely try to keep my voice and convey the story the way I intended it," added Stefan Hertmans. In reply to the opening question and to close the debate, it was said that a book is an organic medium, and therefore neither a hammer nor an axe.

"I'M DRAWN TO ANTI-HEROES," SAYS MATZ



ALEXIS NOLENT AKA "MATZ" is a comic book writer, who collaborates with video game creators and has written a book. However, last year, his name was mentioned extensively in connection with David Fincher's film *The Killer* because Nolent is the author of the comic book the film is based on.

"I talked to David Fincher about *The Killer* 15 years ago. He told me about his vision. And I saw it in the resulting film last year. It is a film about a hero who lies to himself all the time. I find the way the film unfolds very clever. And when Fincher told me about his intention for the end of the film, I thought that I should have thought of that," laughed the French author during the debate.

Together with him, comic book author, screenwriter and writer Štěpán Kopřiva and director and producer Matěj Chlupáček also sat behind the microphones, in addition to the host from the Crew publishing house.

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“MY THEME IS EMPATHY,” SAYS IRISH AUTHOR JOHN BOYNE



John Boyne

“In the past there was no division of books into books for children, young adults, and so for. They were simply books, and people didn’t care so much whether they were meant specifically for them or not. And I think that the author shouldn’t be so concerned about his or her target audience when writing,” said Irish writer **JOHN BOYNE** at the beginning of his Thursday meeting with illustrator **MARTO KELBL**. They discussed the topic of queer literature in relation to young readers.

Marto Kelbl is the author of the book entitled **Ani holka, ani kluk** [Neither Girl, Nor Boy] describing the life of non-binary and transgender people. It is the first book written in Czech on this topic that was nominated for the *Magnesia Litera* award. John Boyne, author of the bestseller **The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas**, published a book entitled **My Brother’s Name Is Jessica** in 2020, describing the transition of an older sibling of the main character.

In the audience, among others, was Marek Torčík, this year’s *Magnesia Litera* laureate, whose novel **Rozložíš paměť** [Memory Burn] also deals with the LGBTQ+ topic.

“When I grew up in Ireland, there was almost no chance to get a book featuring queer characters. The moment I finally read one, it was unbelievable. That was the first time when I found myself in literature!” confided Boyne. Marto Kelbl said that she has not yet found a work with which she would fully identify,

“I usually find fragments but I haven’t found anything that would resonate as a whole. Nowadays there are more stories dealing with LGBTQ+ but we still need more.”

The author also added that it would be good to balance the situations in which queer characters find themselves a little more. **“One of the dominant topics of many LGBTQ+ stories I’ve read or seen was for example AIDS. It made me worry that my future was death and sorrow. I think that it is important to write about the happy things, humour or simply normal everyday life.”**

In Czech literature, according to Kelbl, in addition to these topics, there is also space for Roma or Vietnamese stories.

John Boyne also mentioned unpleasant reactions to his book **My Brother’s Name Is Jessica**. He said that part of the inspiration for the book came from his conversations with a friend who had gone through the transition herself. **“Some people complained that the main character was a little boy and not Jessica. Or that I write about this topic even though it has nothing to do with me personally. But the main topic of my book is not gender or sexuality, but empathy, compassion and love. Just like The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas is not about holocaust but about friendship,”** explained Boyne. He said that his reading and literary career was shaped by the writers Jonathan Coe and Sarah Waters, whom he recommended to a younger audience.

Boyne closed the debate with advice for young readers and attendees, **“Don’t worry about the internet. You don’t have to share everything. There are more interesting things. I might sound like an old person, but I don’t think it is good to spend so much time on the internet.”** In his opinion, the environment of social networks and discussion forums is the worst for women. People writing comments, as well as journalists, are brutal towards women, commenting indiscriminately on their bodies and life decisions. Marto Kelbl added advice for adults, **“If a child or teenager comes to you, make an effort and try to understand what the child is trying to tell you. Don’t brush them off.”**

GIAN MARCO GRIFFI AND HIS “INCIAMPI”

An interesting author-publisher-translator meeting took place over GIAN MARCO GRIFFI’S book *Inciampi* [Hurdles].

The audience in the packed theatre was welcomed by the Director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Prague, who highlighted the amazing cooperation between the Czech Republic and Italy and introduced the three main speakers of the programme, namely writer Gian Marco Griffi, publisher and translator Alice Flemrová and translator Sára Rodová, who were brought together by the book **Inciampi**. Alice Flemrová is a successful translator but in this case she acted as a publisher. **“I discovered Gian Marco thanks to his novel *Ferrovie del Messico* [Mexican Railways], which became the Italian literary event of 2022. I liked his passion, his enthusiasm for literature and the way he uses his imagination,”** said Alice Flemrová, explaining why she decided to publish **Inciampi**. It is a collection of short stories that are connected by characters and the set-

ting. So, it is not individual stories, but a sort of “short story novel”. **“I wrote the stories with the idea that they would be part of a collection,”** added Gian Marco Griffi. The region of Monferrat and its inhabitants play an important part in the stories, but Gian Marco also wanders off to Mexico or Turkmenistan, places he has never visited. He pictured these places using his imagination, so sometimes the description might be quite bizarre. **“I enjoy writing about places I’ve never visited. Of course, I research some information, but in general I let the character I place there lead me.”** One of the countries that Gian Marco writes about in the book is also the Czech Republic. **“I discovered Czech literature thanks to the book *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Then I fell in love with *Hrabal* and *Hašek*. I like the way they tell stories, their humour, irony and the way**

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“Comic books are the best source material for films because of their visual component and the way they tell stories. Unlike, for example, computer games, they are a very natural medium for film,” said Kopřiva. Chlupáček revealed that he likes works influenced by comic books, such as the film **Blue Is the Warmest Colour** or the HBO series **Watchmen**.

“When adapting for film, it is important that the filmmakers stay true to the spirit of the original work. But I never ask to be a part of the film making process. Filmmakers have to interpret the work in their own way,” stressed Alexis “Matz” Nolent, adding that many films are better than the literary works they are based on. The other guests were of the same opinion. **“Filmmakers have to find the key to what works in comics, and they have to discover the film means to translate this unique angle into film language,”** added Štěpán Kopřiva. Matěj Chlupáček described from the position of a filmmaker what suits him when working on films, **“I’m always happy when the author is there and helps work on the film. But a film is not a copy of a book, it follows different rules.”**

Chlupáček said that he saw **The Killer** in New York where he was lucky to get the last ticket before the theatre sold out. **“It was interesting to watch the reaction of the American audience. I liked that the film kept the essence of the comic book,”** he said. Kopřiva appreciated that the film remained true to the difference between the hero’s image of himself and his actions.

Nolent also reflected on the way to approach anti-heroes, such as the assassin from **The Killer**. **“I realized that I was attracted to anti-heroes because there’s more conflict in their stories. The theme of all my stories is conscience. If I wrote about positive heroes, none of this would be so significant,”** said the French writer. He also admitted that he does not like when thieves and murderers are portrayed as cool and lovely people. **“Such an idea is pure fantasy. When I was young, I witnessed a bank robbery in Paris. Nobody and none of that was cool,”** he added.

Štěpán Kopřiva admitted that he likes to hold his anti-heroes accountable for their behaviour. He says that it is interesting to see whether they will come to terms with the consequences of their actions and, if so, how. Matěj Chlupáček said that he likes to use detective stories to attract the audience. Later in the story, however, he loses the detective plot and switches to drama.

Finally, “Matz” also described his work on computer games, which is much more extensive and less free than his own comic book work. He also added that he is influenced by anything he is doing. **“Burroughs said that a writer works 24/7. I think it’s absolutely true,”** the author concluded.

they depict even tragic things with humour.” At the end of the debate, Gian Marco paid tribute to the writers who first made him read and then write. **“Literature is my passion, I became a writer because of what I read in my life, and I will always be grateful for that. Everything I’ve read has helped make me the writer I’ve become.”**

ARMENIANS CAN LAUGH THROUGH TEARS

Armenian writer **NARINE ABGARYAN** has experienced war and she writes about difficult things but never loses her sense of humour, as evidenced by the debate during which she “infected” the audience with her positive energy.



Kateřina Šimová, Radka Lubilina, Narine Abgaryan

Narine recalled her childhood in Armenia, when she happily nibbled on her grandmother's heavily buttered bread, sat on a tree and looked down on the world. Then her life was shattered by the Nagorno-Karabakh war and she experienced poverty, hunger, fear. Her collection of short stories *Daleje žít* [Live On] is about how even after terrible events, you have to pick yourself up and live again. “It is a book about war I experienced myself. I know what it means to be a refugee, I know hunger, blockade, cold... I wanted to write about people who survived the war, I wanted it to end with hope,” she explained. Narine writes in Russian, even though she is Armenian by birth. “If I hadn't gone to Russia, I probably wouldn't have been writing at all. I started writing because I was terribly homesick. And why in Russian? I moved to Russia when I was twenty-three. I could

choose whether to write in Russian or Armenian, but my written Armenian was worse than my Russian. So, I decided to write in Russian but I use Armenian words in the text as well. I wanted to add some Armenian flavour, so that the whole thing would sound at least a little bit Armenian. I hope I succeeded because some readers say I write Armenian in Russian, which I take as a compliment.” Translator Kateřina Šimová confessed that it was not easy to translate Narine's original writing style into Czech. “I tried to make the translation fluid, so I decided against explanatory footnotes and glossaries and incorporated everything into the text. And I made a rod for my own back because it was difficult to translate some expressions in such a way that they would be understandable for the reader and at the same time to remain faithful to the original. I remem-

ber a scene from the book *Three Apples Fell from the Sky*, where a tree grows from feathers of a white peacock on the edge of a ravine and it covers the ravine with white flowers, berries and leaves. The literal translation of the name of the tree is “bobkovišeň” [cherry laurel]. I didn't like the term because it didn't fit in the text. In the end, I “planted” střemcha [bird cherry] there instead. Milan Kundera said that a translation is either beautiful or faithful. In this case, I opted for a beautiful translation, but otherwise I translate faithfully,” laughed Kateřina Šimová. Narine continued by explaining why the Armenian fairy tale ends with three apples falling from the tree. “I asked my grandmother and she told me that it was a reference to the apple of Eden. Any why three of them? Well, because Armenians exaggerate everything,” explained Narine with humour. “Armenians are a tragicomic nation, they know how to laugh through tears and how to make fun of themselves. We say, for example, that we have a big sea in Armenia, only there is no water in it.” When the debate shifted from humour to a serious topic, the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, Narine admitted that writing had a therapeutic effect on her. Her sister started writing for the same reason, she was a teenager during the war and because of the psychological trauma, not only she, but many of her peers could not get pregnant. “Every book has its time. I didn't plan any of my books, the topic found me and I wrote it,” she said. As Narine is currently the most widely read Armenian author, her stories help not only her but many Armenians, and through translations, they also speak to other people around the world.

IS THERE A WAY TO DEAL WITH RACISM?

What it's like to be different, to stand out from mainstream society, to stand out from the crowd... these are the topics addressed in their books by German author with Turkish roots **FATMA AYDEMİR** and Czech author **PATRIK BANGA**. In the presence of translator **VIKTORIE HANIŠOVÁ**, the two met to share the experiences they drew on while working on their books.

German writer and journalist Fatma Aydemir debuted in 2017 with her novel *Ellbogen* [Elbow] and her German-Turkish generational novel *Dschinns* (translated into Czech by Viktorie Hanišová), which she introduced to Czech readers, was shortlisted for the German Book Prize. Journalist Patrik Banga came to present his first work, *Skutečná cesta ven* [The Real Way Out], in which he recounts memories of his childhood and adolescence in the Roma community in Prague's Žižkov district in the wild 1990s.

“When I found out I was supposed to be the host of this debate, I thought there was no connection between Patrik Banga and Fatma Aydemir. But then I realised that they have a lot in common,” said translator Viktorie Hanišová at the beginning of the debate. She asked both guests whether they were bothered by being labelled as “different”. “The book industry often works with such labels to draw attention to the books in question, to get them to readers more easily. I'm used to it and I'm not offended,” replied Fatma. “I don't think that I can ever get out of the box labelled “Roma author”. I still get emails from people that I'm a freeloader and that I'm on benefits, but they send these emails to my work email address so

it should be clear to them that I have a job. On the other hand, I'm the living proof that people can put a label on you but you can still succeed despite of it.”

Fatma explained why her book is entitled *Dschinns* [Genies]. “A Genie is a mythological character that plays a very important role in the Islamic world. It can also be found in Quran. But in my book, I draw on superstitions that get passed on in families. By doing a certain thing you can invoke a Genie and then you won't get rid of him. I like the idea that there is something in the room with us that we can't see. Genies belong to my world, they share it with us.” Patrik Banga's book also describes the world that is or was typical of his life. “I wanted to record what 1990s were like. Back then, when your name was Čonka, Cina or Kováč, you automatically went to a special school. You were not allowed to go to soccer practice or have hobbies like other kids, it just wasn't possible. But we spent a lot of time at the police station. I was arrested twenty-seven times and first stood trial at the age of fifteen for allegedly beating up neo-Nazis. It was absurd.” Fatma's novel also takes place in the 1990s. “I was little. I grew up in a village where there were no foreigners so we stood out. But

unlike Patrik's book, mine is not an autobiography, it is a fictional story, but it does feature a lot of things that my family experienced. At that time, it was common in Germany to set fire to houses where migrant families lived. In one such attack, fifteen people were burned to death. I remember it but it is not generally known. Three such attacks are known but there are many more that have never been investigated. I wanted to know what happened to the survivors and how it changed their relationships?” The characters in her book deal with xenophobia in different ways. One character pretends to be German and dyes her hair, while the other proudly claims her Kurdish nationality. “I was fascinated by how members of the same family could perceive racism completely differently. I myself don't know if there is any right way to deal with it.” When asked if he himself had come to terms with racism, Patrik Banga answered that he had not. “Five hundred times you can get a nasty email and you don't get mad, and then one comes along that attacks you in a way that gets to you. So, I know that I haven't come to terms with it. Whenever we deal with something at work that might smack of racism, it is dealt with by my colleague Tereza because no one will accuse her of being racist. But if I delete an inappropriate post, for example, they immediately accuse me of being racist.” Patrik compared himself to a character from Fatma's novel, who is cheeky, but knows when to “back off”.



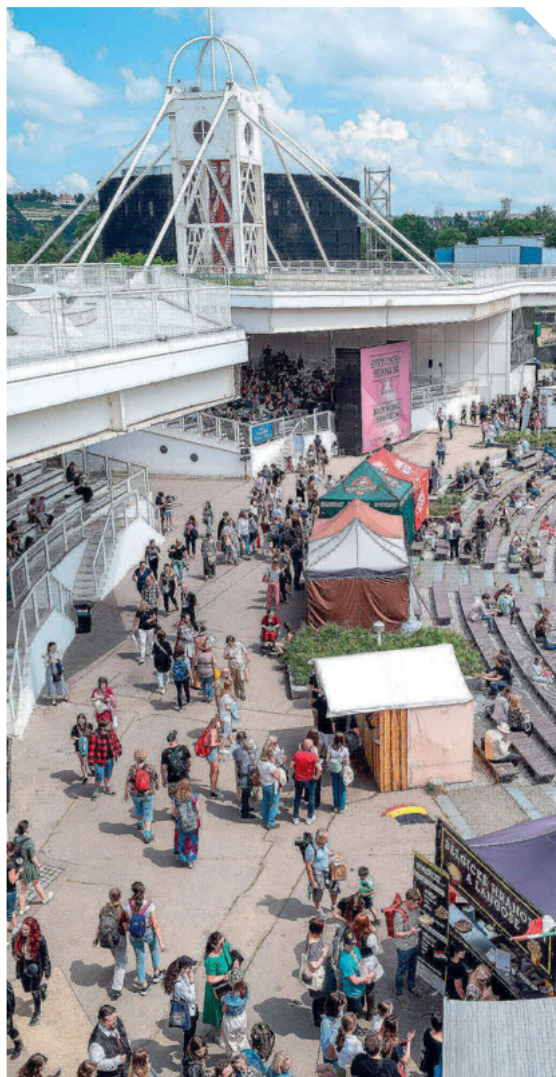
Lars Kepler či Alex Ahndoril, to jsou pseudonymy spisovatelské a manželské dvojice **Alexandry Coelho** a **Alexandra Ahndorilových**, kteří podepisovali své detektivní romány. / Lars Kepler or Alex Ahndoril are the pen names of authors and married couple **Alexandra Coelho** and **Alexander Ahndoril**, who signed their detective novels.



Německý spisovatel **Bernhard Schlink**, autor románu *Předčítač*, diskutoval o svém celoživotním díle. / German writer **Bernhard Schlink**, author of the novel *The Reader*, discussed his life's work.



Argentinský spisovatel **Juan Pablo Bertazza**, žijící nyní v České republice, přečetl úryvky ze své tvorby. / Argentinian writer **Juan Pablo Bertazza**, currently living in the Czech Republic, read excerpts from his work.



Julie Caplinová (vlevo) pokřtila překlad nové knihy *Vila v Itálii*. / **Julie Caplin** (on the left) launched and introduced her new book *A Villa with a View*.



Mariusz Szczygiel při prezentaci nové knihy *Fakta musí zatančit*. / **Mariusz Szczygiel** presented his new book *Fakty muszą zatańczyć* [*Facts Must Dance*].



Manželé **Wolfgang** a **Helene Beltracchi** vyprávěli vlastní příběh výjimečných padělatelů umění. / Married couple **Wolfgang** and **Helene Beltracchi** told their own story of exceptional art forgers.

SVĚT KNIHY PRAHA
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