

Book World Prague '22

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Prague Exhibition
Grounds

27th International Book Fair
and Literary Festival

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We live for books. “
A sweet mission in this
world dominated by
disorder and decay.
(Umberto Eco,
The Name of the Rose)
”





Book World Prague '22

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156

programmes
465

countries
33

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9

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746

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My Native Dialect Misses the Word for Love

DONATELLA DI PIETRANTONIO'S books have two recurring themes – coming to terms with complicated maternal relationships, and abandonment. Both are present in her debut work *My Mother Is a River*, in her second book *Bella Mia* about a life affected by earthquake, and also in her best-known work entitled *A Girl Returned*. This book stood at the centre of attention of most of Thursday's Book World debate.

The book's main character is adopted as an infant, discovers the truth when coming of age and returns home. The text has been translated into 25 languages and Donatella Di Pietrantonio received the prestigious Premio Campiello award. "In 1950s and 60s Italy, this practice was quite widespread. Poor families with much offspring would give up their youngest child – send it to childless couples. The biological family could simply no longer support them. For a child to return to her or his original family was extremely rare. I tried to get inside the head of a girl who suddenly discovers the truth about her birth and origin," says the writer who works as a dentist.

Silence is another topic addressed by the book – the inability to communicate and to



Donatella Di Pietrantonio

show warmth and feeling was another characteristic trait of that particular period and place. Donatella Di Pietrantonio explained that one of the reasons is the language itself. "In Abruzzo, the region of my youth, as well as in many other places, people speak a dialect that is very much connected to land. You only say what is absolutely necessary. Put simply, these dia-

lects are missing words that would put names to feelings. Mine, for example, has no word for love or loving," the author explains. She also noted the limited capacity to demonstrate one's love of their children in a physical way – parents and other relatives would not hug their children for fear of spoiling them.

In the rough countryside environment, an important role was played by staunchly patriarchal structure. "Women were totally subjugated by men. My mother was in many ways subjected to her father-in-law – a most fearful authority. Women did not become subjugated by their own husband, because in such a relationship they could still negotiate. They belonged to their father and later they would become subjected to their father-in-law. This was even worse. The father would still have some feelings, but the father-in-law wouldn't care about his daughter-in-law at all. It was a part of men's upbringing never to show their feelings. A woman would come into a family to give birth, to adopt its surname and to work. Inner life, breath of air – all this was exceptional and rare," the Italian writer concluded. The story of the novel *A Girl Returned* continues in the book *Borgo Sud* published last year.

Democracy Is Waning in the World. We Should Know How to Defend It

Many visitors came to witness the concluding encounter in the Large Theatre on Friday evening. **ADAM MICHNIK**, a well-known dissident, one of the leaders of the independent trade union Solidarity, journalist, historian and editor-in-chief of the *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily, was joined on the stage by **NATHAN LAW**, who, in 2014, became one of the student leaders of the Umbrella Revolution.

Michnik took part in Polish student demonstrations of 1968 and had been sentenced to jail for three years. He was imprisoned again for organising a strike in the mid-eighties. Nathan Law also spent time in jail for partaking in protests, and currently lives in exile in the United Kingdom. The topic was self-evident – students as a revolution's vanguard. Quickly, however, the debate turned towards contemporary global issues, such as the war in Ukraine, China's policies, or the current developments in Poland.

"With great admiration we all watched how the young people of Hong Kong had risen, challenging the stereotype that freedom is simply not suited to certain nations. This is often said of countries like Russia or China, but experience shows us that people long for freedom," Adam Michnik started the debate. He recalled the year 1968 when, he said, students in many countries took to the streets, kick-starting a chain of events. "Revolutions have many consequences – some good, some bad. I myself believe that every revolution makes sense, whether it fails or succeeds. The idea behind the 2014 events in Hong Kong came from previous Chinese revolutions. It drew its



Adam Michnik, Nathan Law

inspiration from the year 1989. The protests had sowed the seed of doubt and this had been revived in 2019," Nathan Law said.

Adam Michnik offered a scathing look at contemporary events in Poland: "Today's Poland desperately needs a change. This government 'putinises' the state. Changes are being adopted which, on the inside, are similar to what Putin is doing. We must not let ourselves be surrounded by violence. The minority that governs us must once again become open to diversity." The debate also touched on the topic of the instruments of repressing and deceiving the public. "All dictatorships use lies as a weapon. Poland's governing party is heading in the direction of a dictatorship. Same as it is forbidden to speak about the Tiananmen massacre in China, president Kaczyński refuses to speak about Putin's assassination of

the Polish president. Or you keep hearing that Germans are responsible for the Katyn massacre. But that's not true – it was done by the Russians." According to Michnik, lies must be confronted and rooted out. It is necessary to revive ways of reintroducing the truth into Russia. Michnik says that the future of democracy will be decided in these very countries: Russia and China. Our obligation is to help and to talk about compromise.

"Democracy is waning in the world and we must realise it. We should know how to defend it. China is one of the most authoritarian regimes, and it keeps expanding. It is necessary to adopt a whole lot of policies and to look at China as an adversary, because it does compete with the democratic regimes. Changing our approach to China is the best thing we can do right now," Nathan Law noted.

I Am an Ardent Liar and I Enjoy It Very Much

The French-Moroccan writer **LEÏLA SLIMANI** enchanted the filled auditorium of Book World Prague's Large Theatre with her humour and intriguing perspective of the Moroccan society, women and lies.

"Working on my first book, I realised what literature actually meant to me. It is a world in which I experience no fear, which sets me free. When I write, I don't really care if somebody likes it. A stark contrast to my upbringing. As a child I was always pushed into being a nice and polite little girl. But when I write, I can do whatever I want," said Slimani at the start of the debate, giving it a clear direction.

Her debut tells the story of a Parisienne named Adele, who is obsessed with sex and constantly tells lies. According to the author, many women, also Moroccan ones, identify with her. Arab men, on the other hand, think she must be a typical Westerner. Leïla Slimani admitted that when writing *Adele* she made the conscious choice of not revealing her character's ethnicity. If Adele was a Muslim, the book would have been banned in Morocco. Lies are very much present not just in Leïla Slimani's books, but also in her life. *"A part of our freedom rests in our right to lie. Or at least not to say everything. Often women are required to tell the complete truth while a man, unlike a woman, is entitled to a little secrecy. I mean, he must come to terms with his sexual-*



ity! I myself am an ardent liar and I enjoy it very much," she said with a laugh.

This proclivity to lying is, according to the famous writer, inherited. Both her mother and her grandmother like to add more colour to reality and take joy in being able to make things up. Leïla Slimani wants to write a trilogy about her family. *"One of the reasons is to enable my grandma and grandpa to exist as literary characters. I wanted to transform their lies into a reality. I also write it to stop time and fight against oblivion. My father died twenty years ago and I find it more and more difficult to conjure up his face and our shared experiences. I want to continue in the dialogue with my loved ones who are being pushed into the distance by death. Plus, I want to make mate-*

I Offer My Short Stories Like a Bartender Would His Cocktails



The Israeli author **ETGAR KERET** introduced himself to the filled auditorium of the Large Theatre, located in a stylish and well-ventilated tent this year. The debate was moderated by Pierre Friedmann.

Keret's first book was published thirty years ago. In the meantime, its author has gained worldwide acclaim and his books are published around the globe. Almost all his books have also been translated into Czech. The latest one, called *Fly Already*, was published in Czech by Garamond publishers. As Pierre Friedmann mentioned at the start of the debate, Etgar Keret specialises in short stories – a genre that is often avoided by writers. But Etgar finds magic in them not just for himself but also for the readers. *"Mind you, I don't write short stories to be successful. I write them because I enjoy it. I don't really understand why they are underestimated, and why they are less successful than other genres."* On this topic Pierre Friedmann added: *"Short*

stories are considered to be the first step towards a novel, but my feeling is that they are more difficult than novels. In a novel you can write many pages, no need to use words sparingly. In a short story you have to be succinct, everything you say must be to the point and simple." Keret's short stories are characterised by specific sense of humour, a certain peculiar 'optimistically sad' point of view. *"There is sadness in me. I am aware of it. It is in part because I know how much potential we as human beings have, and that we are unable to use it. There is hope, on the other hand, that we could make the situation at least a little better. Humour is like this small inflated pillow that makes even emotionally charged situations lighter,"* Etgar explained the style of his writing. *"Are you an optimist?"* Pierre Friedmann asked. *"Actually, I am. It is my strategic plan to be one. I consider both optimism and pessimism a question of choice."* Then Etgar introduced his new novel *Fly Already*. *"It's a melodrama. I like strong ideas and situations. That's why I confront my characters with such critical situations,"* he explained and added that everything naturally stems from his own feelings and attitudes. *"My name is Etgar Keret and I am afraid of death. And when I fall in love, that person usually loves somebody else. My short stories are like a confession. They are therapeutic. I am striving for inner peace, and telling other people stories helps me achieve that,"* he said at the close of the debate. *"I offer my short stories like a bartender would his cocktails. Give it a taste. Some will identify with it, others won't. That's life."*

rial my culture and its people," explains the author. Another reason, according to Slimani, is to show Moroccan literature and its universal elements. She said that the West often sees Southern countries as exotic, without taking them really seriously. But Moroccan literature and its other smaller counterparts have a great potential. The world of books is currently dominated by topics such as colonisation, migration or the search for identity, and these topics are primarily tackled by writers from smaller literary markets.

With a smile, Slimani also explained why she had turned down the offer to become the country's minister of culture: *"It's not for me. I hate meetings and I like doing what I want. I get up late, have a beer, smoke in the apartment, go back to bed... So, I turned it down."* She also revealed her fascination with women. *"From early childhood, women always felt like a mystery to me. I wanted to know what they were like, what they were thinking. As a child I had the feeling that men were everywhere – in the cafes, on the street, in books. They spoke in loud voices, bragged about themselves. In our household, we were many women. We would shout, pull at each other's hair, you could hardly hear my dad. Women were always telling stories that were very interesting but I had never read them in any book. That's why I write about them,"* she added.

I Often Surprise Myself by the Identity of the Murderer



Book World's Large Theatre was filled to maximum capacity – a sign that the upcoming debate would host a literary superstar. **SHARI LAPENA**, Canadian author nicknamed 'the queen of domestic thrillers', has a considerable fanbase not just in the Czech Republic but around the world.

Friendly, joyful and relaxed – that is how the globally bestselling writer presented herself to the book fair audience. The worldwide success of the author of *The Couple Next Door*, *Someone We Know*, *The End of Her* and *An Unwanted Guest*, which have all also been published in Czech, would perhaps allow a little star-like behaviour, but Shari Lapena would have none of it. Her replies to the readers' questions came with a smile and a fair helping of humour.

"I hope my books are of the unputdownable type. They contain a lot of twists and need to be read all the way through. Unlike action thrillers, my stories are based on relationships," she said when asked for a characterisation of

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her books. Sometimes she gets so immersed in writing that she just cannot stop. "Not that I would forget dinner because of it or anything like that, but sometimes I just write and write, simply out of sheer interest in what will happen with my characters next," she explained, saying that the story gradually develops under her fingertips. "In the beginning, I know nothing at all. Not even who the killer is. I have many suspects, numerous motives, then come all the plot twists, and only as I near the end I find out who the murderer really is. Sometimes I am surprised myself by how it all turns out."

Since her books often focus on neighbourly relations, one question really was hanging in the air: Did you ever have trouble with your neighbours? Shari answered in the negative. "Now we have moved from the city to the countryside, where the neighbours are some distance away, so let's see." Another audience member asked what she thought about being called the new Agatha Christie – a great honour and compliment, the author answered.

Shari Lapena also revealed that she gets her inspiration from news stories and crime columns. Her latest novel **Not a Happy Family**, however, comes from a different source. "I knew I wanted my story to have some adult siblings, who would be thought to have mur-

dered their parents for money. I then built the story out of these ingredients." Given the fact that Shari's stories sometimes offer more open ends, she was asked whether she ever considered writing a sequel to any of her books. "I see my characters as real people and I always find myself thinking what would come next, what would they end up doing. But I am not planning a sequel to any of the books right now, even though readers often ask for it."

According to Shari Lapena, none of her characters were written in her image. "It's not a bad idea and I will think about it. Sometimes I do lend them my feelings, however. Like a mother who is frustrated that her son doesn't want to get up in the morning. I am very familiar with that feeling," she laughed.

One audience member asked when is the next book due. "You know what, it's not fair – you read the book in a couple of days but I take a year to write it. Give me a little while," Shari answered with a smile. She did reveal, however, that the book will focus on a nine-year-old school girl who goes missing.

There were many more questions and answers and the one-hour encounter passed just as quickly and pleasantly as the reading of one of Shari's crime novels. At the very end, the Czech translation of her latest book **Not a Happy Family** was officially launched.

I Can't Imagine Someone Actually Understanding My Books



Oddný Eir

Icelandic author **ODDNÝ EIR'S** novel **Land of Love and Ruins** was awarded the European Union's Prize for Literature and the Icelandic Prize for Literature by Women. She was also one of the guests of the Literary Marathon – encounter with contemporary European authors. The writer described how she writes and also introduced her translator Lucie Korecká.

"I used to write diaries. It was always a joy for me. As a child I took it as a challenge. Today I prefer writing poetry and I channel the writing energy into my books," revealed the writer, whose other jobs include writing lyrics for the famous singer Björk. Not surprisingly, the book **Land of Love and Ruins** adopts the form of a diary. "I cannot imagine that someone would actually understand my books. It is a collection of various ways in which people speak and perceive things," mused Oddný Eir. She also offered a comparison of her experiences from years spent living in Paris, New York and Budapest. She is quite familiar with Prague and Brno, too. "People in New York and Paris are very self-confident. This has its historical roots. They know that at times of trouble their voices will be heard. Central Europe, on the other hand, is very different," she added.

For Lucie Korecká, working on **Land of Love and Ruins** was the most difficult and joyful task at the same time. "This must have been the most taxing translation I have ever done. But I also had the most fun doing it. The text is multi-layered. It contains, among other things, many allusions or internet links to terms from Icelandic culture. I had to take into consideration the logic of how the chapters are structured. It also involved a fair bit of research," smiled the translator who also works with literature in Faroese and Old Norse. According to Lucie, learning Icelandic is easier for a Czech than it is for a Britton or an American. Unlike English, Icelandic has many linguistic categories that it shares with Czech, such as inflections and similar tenses.



Jiří Theiner Award Goes to Ukraine

The 11th Jiří Theiner Award ceremony, hosted traditionally by Book World, was different from the previous ones in many respects this year. The main change is its focus – until now the award was presented to a person or institution active abroad and significantly aiding the dissemination and promotion of Czech culture around the world. Its laureates include the Belarusian translator Sjarhey Smatrichenka, the South Korean professor Kim Gyu-Jin or the Israeli journalist and writer Ruth Bondy. As of this year, the award will be presented to personalities who raise their voice against censorship and for democracy. The very first laureate of this newly targeted award was the Russophone writer, investigative journalist and the first Belarusian national to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature, **SVETLANA ALEXIEVICH**. "Unfortunately, Svetlana Alexievich had to cancel her participation two days prior to arrival for health reasons," the Book World director Radovan Auer explained. Still, the award and the sum that goes with it found its rightful owner – Svetlana Alexievich decided to dedicate it to Ukrainian authors. "There are many Ukrainian authors visiting the book fair. The ones who will accept the award on their behalf are **KATERYNA MIKHALITSYNA** and **YEVHENIYA KONONENKO**," Radovan Auer said by way of introduction of the two writers. "Thank you for this award. It is an honour for us, especially under these circumstances. Great many Ukrainian authors are currently defending our country with weapons in their hands," Kateryna Mikhalitsyna said as part of her emotional address. "The way I see it, it is an award for freedom of thinking. The capacity to freely think and write should be something natural – and yet it is not," Yevheniya Kononenko added. Both authors then joined



in a discussion with members of the audience and shared their experiences of living in a war zone. "By now my mother-in-law can tell the type of incoming rocket by its sound. This is beyond normal. You cannot get used to war," Yevheniya said. When asked if dialogue can commence with the Russian world once the war is over, both authors offered an almost identical reply: "Dialogue will only be possible when Russia accepts responsibility for all the atrocities it committed," Kateryna Mikhalitsyna said. "Yes, dialogue is possible, but really only with people who admit responsibility," agreed Yevheniya. Both authors also stated that writing with the war lurking behind their back is not easy. "I write poetry to process what we are now experiencing," Kateryna said, adding that the Ukrainian book world keeps turning despite the war. Its turning is slower, more complicated, but it is still alive. "Life is hard for publishers. To publish a book nowadays in, say, Kharkiv, where everybody used to print their books, is close to impossible. The printing houses and warehouses were destroyed by bombs. But everybody is doing what they can. Libraries, for example,

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Zoja and Sedláček Blended Philosophy, Psychology and Economics

Even though the debate between **LUIGI ZOJA** and **TOMÁŠ SEDLÁČEK** was called All Roads Lead to Philosophy, the speakers eventually came to a different conclusion. The encounter between the famous Italian psychoanalyst and writer, and the Czech economist, philosopher and pedagogue, was moderated by Book World programmes director Guillaume Basset.

Luigi Zoja was born in the war years in Milan. He says he remembers nothing of the time when bombs were exploding in the neighbourhood and planes gradually destroyed close to a third of the city. Still, these experiences probably stay recorded in his subconscious. "According to current theories I suffered trauma. It is, of course, possible. For example, I have trouble falling asleep when there is noise around," Zoja said.

The debate also touched on the current topic of the climate crisis. Why do we remain passive when faced with growing influx of in-



Luigi Zoja, Tomáš Sedláček

formation about the worsening situation? Is it denial, or indifference? Guillaume Basset asked. "Very often it is both. People of my age can be indifferent. The catastrophe will come when we are no longer here. But I can also see lack of awareness in the young generation. Today, we have many opportunities how to stay informed. Instead, we often use these channels more for purposes of entertainment. In a way, this is a narcissistic form of behaviour," Luigi Zoja described, warning against an avalanche of individualism. He also said that he dedicates most of his worktime to writing and lecturing in order to contribute to general knowledge.

Tomáš Sedláček had first met Luigi Zoja several years ago, when researching the topic of the significance of Europe for his own book. "We, the economists, have made the major mistake of only looking at Europe from our point of view. Now we can see the spirit of Europe for example in what is taking place in Ukraine," Sedláček explained. He also recalled one of the most often misquoted sentences in history. It is often said that money is the root

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have often been transformed into help centres, where people make masking nets and other products. It's one of the ways how to survive, how to come to terms with the situation," Kateryna said. "In Kyiv books are still sold – mostly electronic, but the important thing is that they are still alive," Yevheniya added. In the end, the debate turned to life after the war. "I don't know what is in store for me as a human being, a mother, a writer after the war. How I will bring back all the things that I have lost. The war has broken everything around us. We are different," Kateryna Mikhalitsyna said. "We will have to work a lot if we are to regain what this war has taken away from us."

of all evil. However, in the Bible it says that it is the love of money that destroys everything. Money is subject to relationships. We cannot own them, create them or destroy them without severe consequences. Sedláček also said that rather than being in a state of depression, the science of economics suffers from manic depression. "You must begin by curing the manic state," he said.

"Narrative is important in everything you do. We live in the centre of the myth of eternal growth. It really is only a myth, even though it is being told all around the world. There will always be a limit," Luigi Zoja noted. "My favourite definition goes: A myth is something that never happened but is happening all the time. The biggest mythmakers are in fact the people in central banks. The financial system does not exist in reality – it's only a mindset. Similar to law. Myths are invisible, non-existent entities for which we are willing to die," Sedláček added. Both speakers then agreed that all roads lead to establishing connections.

Unlike Film, Literature Can Be Less Specific



Francesca Melandri, Marek Šindelka

At one of Book World's concluding debates, **FRANCESCA MELANDRI** and **MAREK ŠINDELKA** discussed the differences between writing books and screenplays. Both authors have experience from literature as well as scriptwriting. Melandri has even directed a film. Their insight into the topic was therefore very practical.

The authors agreed on their dislike for overly literal screen adaptations of books, with the script closely copying the original work. Šindelka mentioned the film *Stalker* as an example of an artistically successful adaptation. Melandri talked about the film *The Leopard* directed by Luchino Visconti.

"When I write a novel, I look for a certain rhythm in the text. I seek its metabolism, its heartbeat. People often tell me that my books are very visual and I hear from directors that they would like to make a film based on them. But I always tell them that my books are not cinematic," Marek Šindelka describes. He also mentioned his fascination with scents, which was a topic picked up by Francesca Melandri who had shared one of her first screenwriting experiences: "It was a film about the youth of Christopher Columbus. He was a seafarer and an important part of his skillset was his

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Our Picture of History Misses the Female Perspective

The Italian authors **STEFANIA AUCI** and **VIOLA ARDONE** have several things in common. They were born in the same year, they are both former teachers, they write about Sicily, and, in their novels, they delve into history. And history and our approaches to it became the main topic of the authors' Book World debate on Thursday.

Viola Ardone admitted to her disappointment with how history is taught in present-day Italy. "Every year, the number of history lessons at schools decreases. But studying history enables our mechanisms of thinking, giving us the opportunity to learn from it and to understand the present," she said. Stefania Auci shares a similar point of view. According to her, there is a feeling in Italy that history should be subjected to other scientific disciplines or commercial subjects. She also highlighted the need to read complex texts. "Only this type of text can enrich you. Not just with knowledge, but by creating new mental structures. It enables you to have a better understanding of reality," she noted. She said her own love of history comes from her father who taught her that every social phenomenon is connected with the territory in which it takes place, and with events experienced in the past by the people who live there. This is also why she tries to tell the story of Sicily in a way differing from the stereotype.

The authors also talked about the role of women in history, and how their tales are told. "When I was studying the official sources and

textbooks, I had to view the world through male eyes. I later wrote a history textbook for senior school pupils myself. I tried to describe history from a wider perspective. Usually this type of literature is very dry – only dates and numbers. You seldom read about the feeling of the time, what were the relationships between people like, how did they live. When I started writing novels, I was annoyed that all the sources only bring the male perspective. And also, that half of humanity was prevented from defining their living conditions," Ardone explained. "Today, more and more authors try to discover the world of women from the past, who were never given a voice. That makes me very happy, especially for reasons of justice – that female capacities and creativity are finally acknowledged," Auci added.

When writing their books, both authors engage in thorough research, discovering new perspectives of traditionally rendered stories or views of events. The conclusion of the debate included a symbolic nod to Virginia Woolf, when both authors emphasised the importance of one's own room for the creative process.

Communism Is Still Present in Us, But its Traces Recede

Three Polish authors, **ADAM BURAKOWSKI**, **ALEKSANDER GUBRYNOWICZ** and **PAWEŁ UKIELSKI**, published a book in 2009 entitled *1989: The Autumn of Nations*. This year, its extended Czech version was published. A Book World debate was joined by political scientist and historian Paweł Ukielski and the Czech political scientist, journalist and expert in democratic transition Josef Mlejnek. The debate was moderated by Maciej Ruczej, director of the Polish Institute in Prague.

According to Paweł Ukielski, the book is exceptional by looking at six central-European countries and chronicling not just the historical events, but also providing an analysis from a political-science perspective. Each of the countries is described in three chapters – period prior to 1989, the revolutionary events, and 30 years after the fall of communism. Josef Mlejnek praises the fact that the authors apply individual approach to each of the countries – describing the specific type of communism, its characteristic features and how they influenced things to come. According to him, the conclusions are “likeably cautious” and encourage further discussion.

The guests could not reach an agreement on whether the events of 1989 could be described as counter-revolutionary. Paweł Ukielski said: “If we agree that in 1989 communism was rejected, and that communism was brought about by a revolution, then in my opinion this constitutes a counter-revolution. We shouldn’t let ourselves be worried by the negative connotations this word was given by the communists themselves.” This profanation of the term is precisely the reason why Josef Mlejnek opposes its use.

Maciej Ruczej posed the important question of whether the shortcomings of the present can still be explained away by referencing our communist histories, which are rapidly receding into the past. “I think that communism’s

heritage is still alive in our countries. But its traces are slowly receding. The socialist nostalgia was much stronger in the nineties. The transformation the society had to undergo was most taxing back then. Nowadays nostalgia is a marginal phenomenon. It reminds us more of a longing for the era of our youth. Making a thick line after which a certain generation will be entirely free of communist influence, however, is not possible,” Ukielski noted. He also said that the position of Central Europe has been specific since the Middle Ages and has its own deep roots, which cannot be blamed on communism. Mlejnek remarked that in 1989 our society was fascinated by a utopian vision of the West. “Czech Republic is a part of Europe. We share many problems. We had idealised the western society, which has many problems of its own and, just like everything else, it develops. Many people refuse to admit that the West continues to move in a certain direction. They are stuck with their role model, version 89,” Josef Mlejnek added.

Another important topic addressed by the two speakers was Russia’s aggression towards Ukraine. “From a certain perspective we can see this war as an attempt at reversing the events of 1989 and 1991. Putin did say that the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 was the biggest catastrophe,” Paweł Ukielski explained. “The war is an attempt to keep the empire intact,” Josef Mlejnek added.

Not War–Weary Yet

The conclusion of the Literature as Voice of Freedom part of the book fair was provided by a young Ukrainian journalist **NATALYA HUMENYUK**, who works for global media, and a Czech journalist and co-editor of the Respekt magazine **TOMÁŠ BROLÍK**.

The dialogue between the two professionals who were interviewing one another offered an interesting look at the work of journalists in a war situation. “How has Ukrainian journalism changed in the past months? Were you as journalists prepared for the war?” Tomáš Brolík asked. “We were ready. I personally was enlightening the readers about the preceding world conflicts, I wrote a book about Donbas and Crimea, I had everything mapped and as journalist I was ready for the start of the war,” Natalya said and added that even though the war currently rages in her own country, it changes nothing about how she or her journalistic colleagues approach it. “We must be professional, no matter where a war happens to be.” When asked if Ukrainian journalism is independent, Natalya answered with a clear yes. “In Russia and Belarus journalism is connected with repressions – they have no freedom of speech. But Ukraine is a democracy. Our president was elected in free and fair elections and we can bring information about everything that is taking place.” One unresolved issue, however, is how to portray war crimes in an ethical way. “We make traumatised people speak about their traumas again and again. I always ask myself if we really must make

them relive their suffering. How to work with personal accounts – that is a great dilemma.” Speaking from his own experience, Tomáš added that there are several TV crews active in Ukraine and naturally each wants to have an eye-witness account of the crimes. In Bucha, for example, people were repeatedly asked the same questions, which must have been tough for them. Natalya noted that ten thousand journalists have been accredited in Ukraine since the beginning of the war, and that according to her opinion they only managed to cover some twenty percent of what was happening. Many things remained out of sight. “Even the big media can only dedicate two or three articles or reports to the war per day, but there are many more stories to be told. We only stay on the surface – in places where the bombs fall. The office of the attorney general has already registered sixteen thousand war crimes and by no means is this the final number. The world media know nothing about most of them,” Natalya added. When asked if the readers and the media themselves can become tired of the war, she recounted her recent experience from a visit to Washington. “That was exactly what people were asking me during debates. Can information from the war result in everybody

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highly developed sense of smell. But how do you show this on the screen? I devised a scene from his family’s canvas workshop. Young Christopher would engage in a game of recognising various pigments through smell. We managed to translate it into the visual language.”

The authors also agreed that the main difference between literature and scriptwriting lies in how much is revealed and how much is said. “Film is an art of the surface in the best sense of the word. You have to show what a person looks like and what they do. You translate it onto the screen through action. Literature concerns itself with inner description. The concreteness that this genre requires was quite a lesson for me. I had to focus on the structure, logic, functional anatomy. Now I draw inspiration from it when writing books,” Marek Šindelka said. Francesca Melandri shared an experience from her recent visit to a Franz Kafka museum to explain the analogy better. “They had Kafka’s letter to his publisher about *The Metamorphosis*. In the letter he says: under no circumstance put an illustration of an insect on the cover! That is what it’s all about. Is Gregor Samsa really a bug, or does he just feel like one? Is he a spider or a scarab? Where does this ambivalence lie? If one saw this clearly spelled out, the story would turn into something quite banal. It would have lost its power. This is something only literature can do – not to say something, not to make its explicit.”

The debate also addressed the question of how screenwriting is affected by budget concerns. “Let me once again use Visconti’s film as an example. His motion picture *The Wanton Countess* contains a well-known battle scene. It has wealth of detail, hundreds of extras in historically exact uniforms. This scene had cost ten times the budget of all the rest of the film. And do you know how this incredible scene is described in the script? With only two words: Battle commences!” Francesca Melandri said. Marek Šindelka admitted that as a screenwriter he welcomes all the manipulation space afforded by the producers. In the Czech Republic, Šindelka says, screenwriters must remain realistic.

becoming weary and people losing interest? I hope it won’t happen. I think four months is too short a time for us to become war-weary.”

In turn, Natalya asked Tomáš about how the Czech society perceives the war in Ukraine. “It is different from all the previous wars that have taken place throughout the world in the past years. Most of them were far away, in places we consider distant. Ukraine, on the other hand, is close, and it is similar to us in some ways. All of a sudden we witnessed an attack on something that feels close.” When asked what the Czech readers are most interested in, Tomáš Brolík said that it is news which goes deeper. “Our readers expect to learn something unexpected. When we go to Ukraine, it’s not with some specific article in mind – we always react to what we find there,” said Tomáš Brolík, adding that he is about to depart for Ukraine in the coming days. Natalya will go there too. Maybe they meet in the same place, recording the same events.



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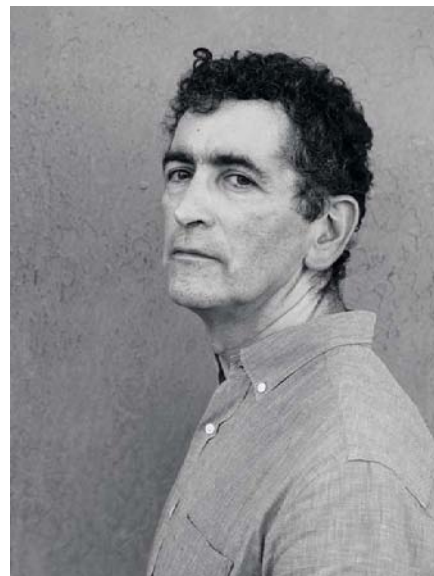
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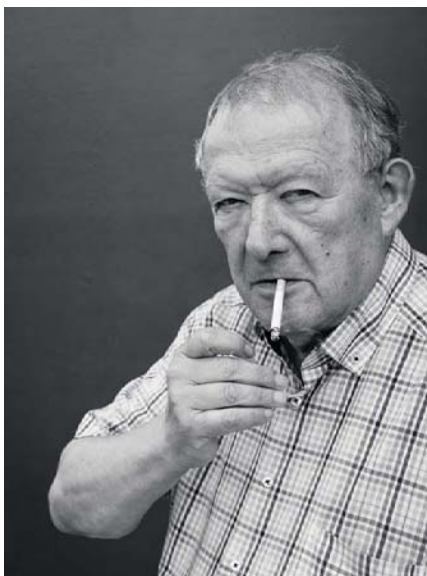
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