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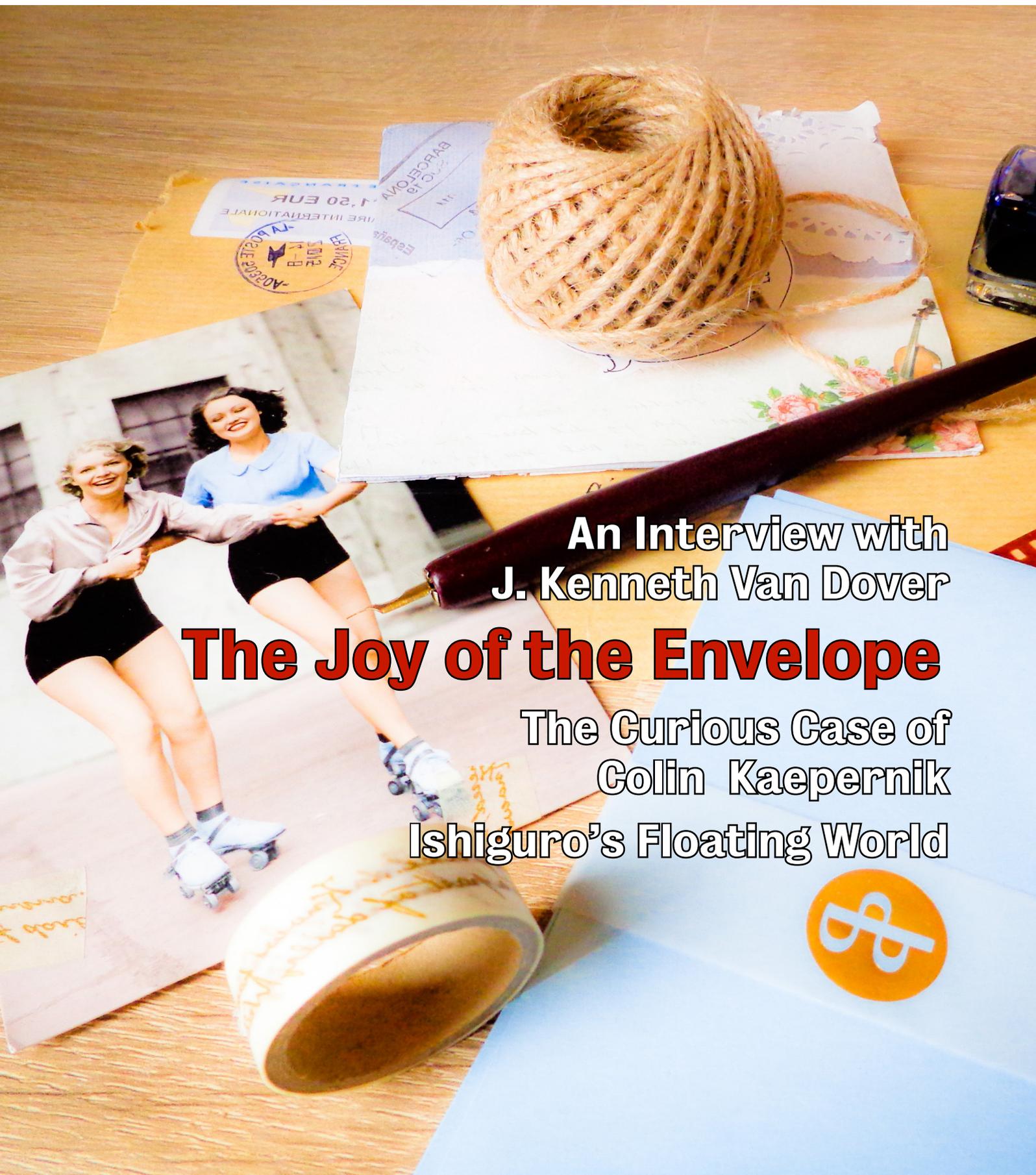
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The Student Magazine of the Department of British and American Studies

PERSPECTIVES

February 2018



An Interview with
J. Kenneth Van Dover

The Joy of the Envelope

The Curious Case of
Colin Kaepernik
Ishiguro's Floating World





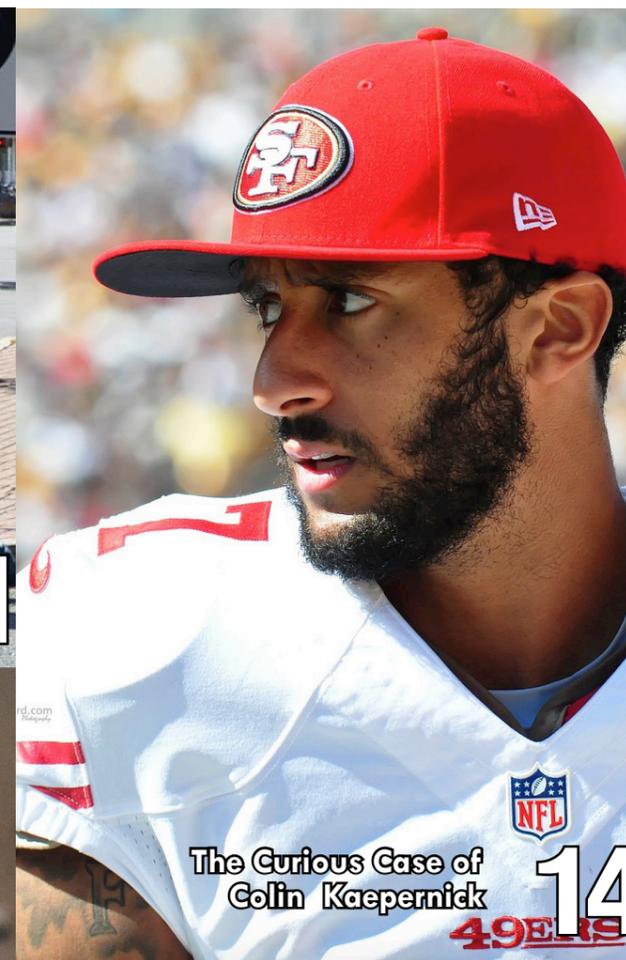
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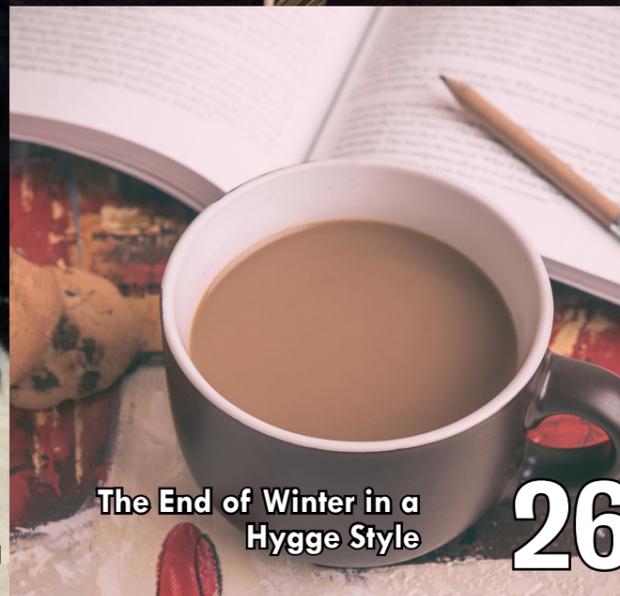
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The Hollow

TEXT: Viktor FÜRSTEN | Photos: Michal LACHKOVIČ

It's almost a tradition now. The last few days of the semester are not only the time for tests and exams, but also the time for cultural experience. Last December was no exception. We gathered in Atelier Babylon on 14 December to see *The Hollow*, a play by Agatha Christie, performed by no one other than the one and only ActofKAA under the direction of Bohdan Metenkanych.

The show opened with a musical number by BandofKAA with the new Head of the Department Ivan Lacko singing just like last semester. Starting with a classic Eagles hit "Hotel California" and continuing with Bee Gees, Billy Talent, Nickelback and finally Pogues, they played a wide variety of songs in a mere half an hour. The last song brought a fun Christmas vibe and left us in anticipation of the play.

This time the evening was emceed by the most popular New Zealander in our department, Mr. Barrer. His humor was spot-on, and I was pleasantly surprised by the amount of stand-up talent this man has.

Finally, the play began. It was a classic murder mystery by Agatha Christie with a closed circle of suspects, set in the Hollow, the house of Sir Henry Angkatell. A gathering of family and friends turns into a crime scene after Doctor Christow gets shot in the living room. Everyone is suspect, including Christow's former girlfriend from ten years ago, Veronica Craye, an actress that has got world famous since then and lives just a short walk away from the Hollow.

Quite an ambitious attempt considering the fact that so far, ActofKAA has produced mostly comedies. This was their first detective story.

The only flaw I would point out was the length. While not entirely their fault because one of the breaks was not scheduled and was rather spontaneous, the play was significantly longer than any of the previous ActofKAA's plays. It lasted for over four

hours, including the breaks. Mainly the first part of the play was a bit uneventful and could have been a tad shorter. After the murder, however, everything was running quite smoothly.

I always admired how ActofKAA, while being only an amateur student theater group, could put up such a performance with noticeably talented acting. While each of the actors is worth noting, there were three that stood out for me. First of all, Tomáš Štrbík playing the role of John Christow, played his death scene quite decently, and while the role wasn't such a perfect fit for him as his role in last year's performance, *The Present Laughter*, his performance proved once again memorable. Nina Vlhová, still quite a newcomer to ActofKAA, having played only in two plays so far, played the role of Henrietta Angkatell, Lord Angkatell's cousin and one of the main suspects, and she has done the job very well. Her talent is undeniable, and she has proved to be a significant addition to the team of ActofKAA. I am looking forward to seeing what her next role will be. Finally, the strongest performance, in my opinion, was that of Alžbeta Krajčovičová, playing the role of Midge Harvey. Her accent is by far the best of

all ActofKAA's actors, and she seems to identify with the characters she impersonates the best. Just like last year in *The Present Laughter*, this year as well I was very pleasantly surprised by her incredibly genuine acting. I should also point out the smooth performance of Roman Stroka, who excelled in the role of a stately, dignified butler Gudgeon. He captured the essence of the stiff, solemn Englishness, which oozed from his every move and utterance.

Overall, I enjoyed *The Hollow*, and I am curious to see what the next performance of ActofKAA is going to be.




ACTOFKAA STUDENT
THEATRE
presents
a play by Agatha Christie
THE HOLLOW

Programme
 18:30 Opening
 19:00 BandofKAA
 19:30 The Hollow
 23:00 Afterparty by
 DJ Letom Svetom


CAST
 Henrietta Angkatell - Nina Vlhová
 Sir Henry Angkatell, KCB - Andrej Jancík
 Lady Angkatell - Angelika Klobušická
 Midge Harvey - Alžbeta Krajčovičová
 Gudgeon - Roman Stroka
 Edward Angkatell - Tomáš Estok
 Doris - Anna Duffeková
 Gerda Cristow - Tadmila Červena
 John Cristow, MD, FRCP - Tomáš Štrbík
 Veronica Craye - Martina Morávková
 Inspector Colquhoun, CID - Lukáš Slovák
 Sergeant Penny - Miroslav Rosenberg
 Director - Bohdan Metenkanych
PRODUCTION TEAM
 Lukáš Slovák
 Tomáš Štrbík
 Tomáš Olas
 Angelika Klobušická
 Petra Pančíková




The Joy of the Envelope

TEXT: Júlia ČÍŽOVÁ | PHOTOS: Júlia ČÍŽOVÁ

To some people, letter writing appears to be a dying art. It seems archaic and pointless at the time when emails are delivered in the blink of an eye. And still, there are people who pick a pen and paper, compose a letter, pay for a stamp at the post office and check their letterboxes, eagerly awaiting a response. What exactly does a letter possess that wins over much quicker means of communication?

When I was fifteen, I came across a book called *Feeling Sorry for Celia* by an Australian writer Jaclyn Moriarty. It was an epistolary novel, in which two girls from neighbouring schools exchange letters during a school project set up by their English teachers. The educators' aim was to revive "the Joy of the Envelope" by getting the students to write to each other. I delightedly pored

over their letters over and over again. The book was humorous, witty and sarcastic, but at times also very touching. It was published in 2000, so the digitalization wasn't as protuberant as it is nowadays, but obviously, letter-writing was slowly fading away. Needless to say, I was charmed by the idea and the book has remained one of my most cherished possessions up to now.

What's even more, it inspired me to find my own penpals and to establish what will probably be life-long friendships.

The communication in the twentieth century underwent some major changes. As new, quick means of communication emerged, the letter faded more and more into oblivion. Progress can't be halted and there are obvious and undeniable advantages to using phones, computers and tablets. Technology renders communication more effective, practical and, most of all, more speedy. But perhaps the purpose of a letter is not to win over emails and phones in terms of speed — its qualities lie elsewhere.

First of all, with old-fashioned correspondence comes a sense of intimacy. Through a letter, it is possible to build up a close, affectionate relationship with another person. Letters act as windows into the penfriend's life and his thinking. It is said that knowing someone's handwriting is a sign of a friendship's longevity. This, of course, had more meaning before the digital era, when receiving a letter from a friend was nothing special. Charlotte Higgins, a British writer and journalist reflects on a time when her friend was unwell and she decided to show that she cared by striking up a correspondence with her. "I wanted her to feel that I was thinking about her in a personal way, and I wasn't sure that could adequately be conveyed by machine-made letterforms."¹ Whereas emails provide a speedy, effective communication, a handwritten letter, however slow, adds a human touch to relationships.

Secondly, one of the most intriguing features of a letter is the effort the writer puts into it. You know that the sender willingly sat down, took a pen and devoted a certain amount of time to produce a thoughtful piece of writing. When writing something on a sheet of paper, people tend to think out their thoughts carefully, order them and make sure they are flawless. As for computers, a simple click deletes any errors you have made. When you make a mistake in a letter, it is far more difficult to correct it without scratching and crossing out your words, all of which reduces the legibility of the writing and is sadly unaesthetic.

Another aspect to consider is that handwritten correspondence is something physical, tactile. Letters will remain with you for as long as you keep them. However, it's hard to imagine that emails or text messages possess quite the same emotional and

¹ Higgins, Charlotte. "The Lost Art of Letter- Writing." *The Guardian*, 23rd October 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/charlottehigginsblog/2012/oct/23/lost-art-letter-writing>

aesthetic value as letters. How many people bring emails to the physical world by printing them and storing them in musty old shoeboxes? The journalist Catherine Field perhaps puts it best when she writes that “A good handwritten letter is a creative act, and not just because it is a visual and tactile pleasure. It is a deliberate act of exposure, a form of vulnerability, because handwriting opens a window on the soul in a way that cyber communication can never do. You savor their arrival and later take care to place them in a box for safe keeping.”²

The digital era depersonalised communication. Even though the message gets across whether you type it on your computer or jot it down on a piece of paper, nothing surpasses the personal touch you get with a letter. When it comes to form, there is nothing special about messages and emails. The same straight rows of black words on a white background written in a standard font, at best adorned by tacky yellow emoticons. A letter, on the other hand,



can serve as an antipole to that. The mere handwriting distinguishes the sender and gives the letter a unique character. Then there's also the stationery, the pen, the stamps and other whatnots. Some people who “snailmail” take it to the next level by transforming letters into small pieces of art. In my opinion, content is more valuable than form, but it surely adds up to the letter when you see that your penfriend put their heart into it. A friend of mine from Spain delights in making her own envelopes from all kinds of materials: wrapping papers, old maps, posters or newspapers. If you have at least a little bit of creativity and don't lack

artistic flair, letters give you the space to unravel it. I devote a considerable amount of free time to decorating letters, as it is my hobby and my favourite form of relaxation. This, of course, isn't anything new. *Mail art* or *Postal art* is actually a movement which originated in the 1960s, when artists realised that an envelope is a brilliant platform for small scale artworks.

In addition, in the study of history, personal letters provide an invaluable source of information. They allow us to view a certain individual through their thoughts, and somehow that gives you more insight into their lives than reading a biography. A hundred years from now, will emails replace letters in the field of historical research? I fear the times when the only written record of a person's life will be an influx of short, frivolous messages carrying no lexical, stylistic or grammatical value.

Also, letters develop one's writing skills. Someone who writes letters has a clear idea of how to introduce an idea, how to expand on it, when to ask questions and start a new paragraph. Emails, surely, teach us the same, but I do find paper to be a better platform for this thanks to the number of distractions the internet imposes on us.

To sum up, letters, with their sheer simplicity, offer us a glimpse into other people's lives in a way that the cyber space can never achieve. Their charm lies in the fact that they're intimate, thoughtful and immensely valuable. The advantages of new forms of communication are indisputable, yet handwritten correspondence still holds a considerable value by providing a contrast to the clinical digital world. Letters show us how to fill the void between us in today's alienated times.

² Field, Catherine. “The Fading Art of Letter Writing.” *New York Times*, 3 February 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/04/opinion/04iht-edfield04.html?_r=0&adxnln=1&adxnlnx=1350921685-0yYAsR2H7xynx9QEon48Q

Interview with

J. Kenneth Van Dover

TEXT: Júlia ČÍŽOVÁ and Viktor FÜRSTEN

Over the last few months, some of the students of our department had the pleasure to attend classes with J. Kenneth Van Dover, a visiting professor of English and American literature. A prolific writer, he has published numerous works specialising in detective fiction. Prof. Van Dover was kind enough to share with us his impressions of Slovakia, his experience with the Fulbright Program and, most of all, his enthusiasm for detective stories.

How are you finding Slovakia?

I've been here for four months almost and I've enjoyed every day of those four months, so I have very positive impressions.

Have you been surprised by anything about the life here?

Well I don't think so. I had done some research and I knew something about Slovakia – about the High Tatras and the mountains, I knew about the industrialization, I knew a little bit about the politics, so no, I wouldn't say I was surprised, pleased but not surprised.

Is this the first time that you are spending time at a different university?

Oh no, this is my fifth time that I got a Fulbright so I taught two years in Germany, a semester in Austria and a semester in China, I've also been to France. Oddly, I've only taught in one place in the United States during my entire career, which is unusual for American academics. We move around especially in the early years, but I got a PhD in May, got a job in August and stayed there for forty years. So, in the States, I've only taught in one place, but I've taught in several places in Europe and in at least one in Asia.

Why is that?

Why I taught abroad? Oh, because I love being abroad. The first Fulbright I got was in Tübingen in Germany and it was just a wonderful experience and every Fulbright since then, including Slovakia, has just been reliving the experience. The Fulbright program really does a good job of preparing the Americans that come into a foreign country or reverse – the Slovaks

that are going back to the States. Every academic community I've been in, in Tübingen, in Stuttgart, in Mannheim, in Vienna, in Bratislava and in Tianjin in China, the universities were all great, both at the administrative level, where I had little to do, but when I had, it always worked very effectively for me, my colleagues in the department had always been very friendly and the students have always been very good. So, I had just consistently positive experiences.

“I have no ability to commit a perfect crime!”

What about the cultural differences, especially in China?

Well, China was in 2000 and it has changed a lot over those seventeen years, but when I was there, the students I had weren't old enough to remember the Cultural Revolution, they were very young, but it had effect on their parents. China was really just opening up to this kind of novelty – the Americans coming and teaching in China. I still have e-mail connections with some of my students from then.

When did you first become interested in detective fiction?

Even as a kid, I loved Agatha Christie and Sherlock Holmes, I always loved the big writers. The interesting thing is that when I was writing – well, the sequence in the States is that you do your graduate courses, then you do “prelims” – preliminary examinations, and if you pass that, they let you do a dissertation and if you do the dissertation, you get the PhD. So, prelims are sort of the big obstacle, like you spend a whole year studying for prelims and they're just four-hour-long exams. So, you have four areas you are studying for, and

Visually Impaired People in Society

TEXT: Marek HUDÁK | PHOTOS: Ben CHURCHILL, Greg STEEL

On November 13, the whole world commemorates the World Sight Day. According to the World Health Organization, a prognosis for the year 2020 indicates that the number of blind people will increase to 76 million and the number of the poor-sighted to 300 million worldwide. In Slovakia, people with visual impairment account for 1-2 percent of the population.

We can divide people with visual impairments into those who are blind and cannot see any light or just some signs of it, and into those who are partially-sighted, who still have some remains of their sight and who are able to use it relatively effectively.

Living with visual impairment is associated with many difficulties. The most prominent for blind and

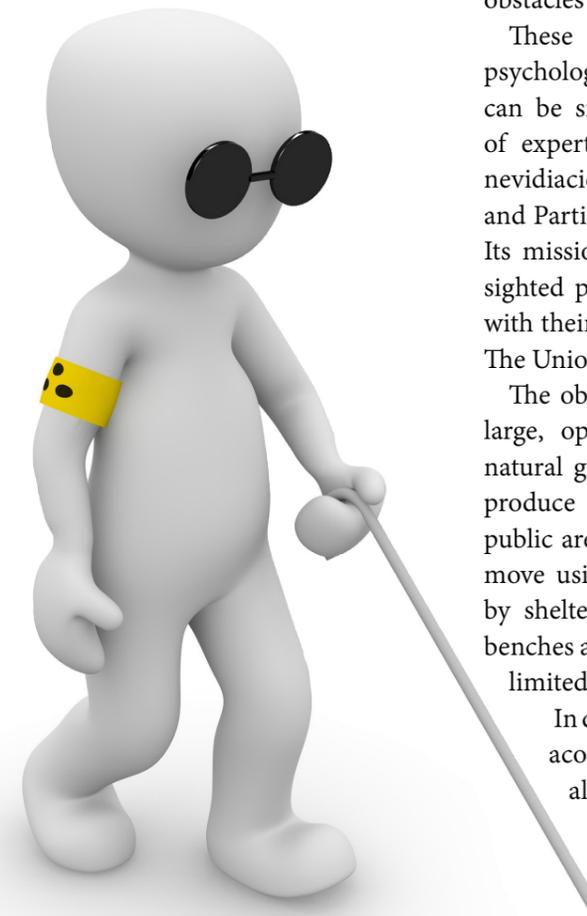
partially sighted people is the difficulty with moving independently and navigation, getting any kind of information and performing home chores such as cooking, cleaning or shopping.

There are a number of limitations that members of healthy population are not even aware of until they are directly confronted with the world of people who have to overcome these artificial and often unnecessary obstacles just to be functional members of society.

These difficulties are often accompanied by psychological problems or feelings of inferiority. They can be significantly reduced by the early provision of expert counselling offered in Slovakia by Únia nevidiacich a slabozrakých Slovenska (Slovak Blind and Partially Sighted Union, Slovak acronym: UNSS). Its mission is to teach and help blind and partially sighted people to overcome the problems associated with their disability and to fully integrate into society. The Union has over 4,000 members.

The obstacles which are hard to overcome include large, open outdoor spaces and interiors without natural guiding lines. In that case, it is necessary to produce artificial lines on streets, stations and in public areas. These lines then help disabled people to move using the white stick. Lines are often crossed by shelters, billboards, trash cans, mailboxes, pots, benches and the like, and their importance is therefore limited.

In dangerous places such as pedestrian crossings, acoustic information beacons are used. They are also used to access buildings that are often visited by blind people, such as the Library for the Blind in Bratislava. An acoustic beacon at the entrance to a building helps a visually impaired person not only to find the building, but also provides information about orientation inside the building through pre-recorded announcements. The elevator



you spend all your time finding twenty interpretations of Richard III, twenty interpretations of Hamlet, this side and that side...infinite interpretations. And then you have a detective story where there are all kinds of problems and at the end there's one clean, clear, correct answer. It was always my great relief, I used to study all day and then in the evening I'd read a detective story. I'd read dozens of stories and I'd buy them for 10 cents at the used-books store.

And so, when I wanted to write my first book, nobody had done a scholarship on detective stories. I could read the entire critical shelf of books over the course of the summer, all the books that had been written on detective stories. Now you could fill whole cabinets with books on detective fiction. It has become a very big thing, but when I first did it, it was very simple, I'd read all the secondary material there was in the summer and then I could sit down in the fall and start to write the book and then the following summer finish the book and it got published. And then I just kept doing it, I enjoyed it and I still enjoy it. I got into it first because I loved it, then because it helped me through my prelims and then because it looked easy. Now it's not easy.

And is there a particular story or author that stands out for you?

I like detective story altogether. I read Spanish, Swedish, Chinese, African, Latin American detective stories and, of course, the English and the French are the two dominant. I haven't read any Slovak detective stories.

What about American authors?

Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, the noir classics, those are the center for me.

Have there been any major changes in the detective story over the last twenty years?

The big change is the Raymond Chandler and the Hammett thing, which turned a detective story into a vehicle for social criticism. Detectives are nice figures for exploring political, social and economic corruption – that's what detectives do.

The next turning point is, I think, the 1960s when Sjöwall and Wahlöö from Sweden, both figures of the Left, realized that you could programmatically use the detective story to analyze a social system. So they sat down and decided to write ten novels in which they would do an anatomy of Swedish socialism. It would tell interesting stories, but the whole thing was

written to reveal the evil effects of social oppression of capitalists upon the working class.

What has happened in the last twenty years is that this has become universalized. If you're a Slovakian and you want to criticize corruption in Slovakia, you create a detective and then you make the crime reflect whatever it is you see wrong in the society, whether it's oppression of women, the poor or minorities. A detective covers all levels of society – he can knock on the door of a prime minister, a detective can talk to someone sleeping under a bridge.

People buy it for the story and you throw it in as a bonus, this is how your society is working. Or not working.

Nowadays, very few writers are writing nice little fables about the body in a library and who could have done it, it's almost all social investigation.

What would you consider to be the perfect crime?

That's what's changed. In Agatha Christie, the perfect crime was that only Hercule Poirot could discover. His companion couldn't understand it, the police couldn't understand it, and the reader couldn't understand it. You could have understood it if only you noticed this little detail. And so the perfect murder is a machine that conceals that one detail, so that you have a surprise in the end.

Now it is much more of an adventure story, an investigation, rather than uncovering all but the crucial detail. So the perfect crime now is where you find out who did it and at the same time you find out what's wrong with the society. It's that secondary question which seems to be secondary, but is in fact the primary point – who's doing what to whom in society rather than who did what to whom in this particular case.

After you've read all of these detective novels, could you commit the perfect crime?

I have no ability to commit the perfect crime, in reality or in fiction!

Could you recommend any favourite authors?

The answer really is that I don't have favorites because I try to enjoy whatever I'm reading. I like Agatha Christie as much as I like Raymond Chandler. It's like mothers with their children, you have no favorites.



control device in the building must be readable by touch. Buttons in the form of a touch screen are inappropriate.

Very important are also barrier-free staircases, which must be equipped with a railing in 900 mm height, and if there is not an elevator in the building, stairs should be straight, not spiral. In this respect, many guesthouses and cottages have very unfortunate solutions regarding not only stairs but sloping roofs as well. A solution would be to stay in a better hotel, but for many it is financially unaffordable.

Making exhibitions and museums available for the visually impaired is an excellent solution to enable them to enjoy visual arts and learn about the world they cannot see. Images that blind people are allowed to touch are embossed.

The Slovak National Museum tries to accommodate its blind and partially-sighted visitors. Therefore, its archaeological exposition was supplemented by a tactile line of exhibits and texts in Braille. Visitors are given a portable device – a sound guide with acoustic information (in Slovak, English, German and Hungarian.) The sign "Do not touch the exhibits" has changed to "Touch, it is allowed".

Another problem is the reduction and removal of pedestrian curbs at pedestrian crossings because for a person with a white stick it may be difficult to identify the edge of a pavement.

Very large physical barriers are railway platforms.

Few railway stations in Slovak towns have elevators by which passengers would be able to get to the platforms with their baggage. Bratislava is not an exception. There are some signs of improvement, for example, in Bratislava passengers are helped by homeless porters three times a week. It is also possible to use a freight elevator to get to a platform, but this service must be requested 24 hours before the trip.

Thousands of visually impaired people also have access to library services. They can find books in Braille, with enlarged font, Pichta's typewriters, magnifying glasses, tape recorders, voice output computers, audio books on cassettes and CDs, and the Library for the Blind in Levoca allows them to download the books even via the Internet.

Nowadays, blind people routinely use computers and mobile phones with voice output. The most widely spread and most popular PC screen reader for blind people JAWS for Windows allows the blind to access programmes and the internet even though they cannot see the screen. Thanks to a software speech synthesizer and sound card, the computer reads all the necessary information. It can speak synthetic Slovak, Czech and various other world languages. It can read documents by individual letters, words, rows, sentences, paragraphs and even fluently. It announces the hierarchical level of titles and thus makes accessible the logical structure of a document.

The importance of guiding dogs for their blind

masters should not be forgotten either. There are, however, several mobile apps that use GPS to help a non-seeing person to navigate within a strange environment. The blind are also assisted by various devices with a high quality voice output such as wrist watches, personal scales and blood pressure meters, and even sound balls. One such device is called ColorTest and is used for color recognition.

The blind encounter most obstacles when moving around in unknown buildings. Fortunately, the Slovak legislation allows the blind to make use of a so-called personal assistant who helps them according to their needs, travels with them, visits doctors with them, etc. However, this job is not very attractive because it is poorly paid. Moreover, no family member can be a personal assistant.

Despite all the physical and psychological barriers, there are blind people who do not barricade themselves within the safety of their four walls, but they not only work but also help others. The most striking example is the Slovak blind singer Maroš Bango, who made himself into an artist not only recognized at home but also abroad. He has gained recognition thanks to several television projects he has appeared in, but only his hard work, talent, and phenomenal musical hearing allowed him to move further and further. He was the guest of thirteen Slovak embassies, including Washington, Ottawa, Moscow, Athens, Rome, Vatican, London, Stockholm, Brussels, and Madrid. During the

year, he also performs dozens of concerts in Slovakia. Maroš's beautiful voice, coupled with the sensitive accompanying word of his wife Alexandra, evokes a storm of emotions in listeners as they transmit the message of faith, love, and hope, although fate was not very gentle towards them, and in addition to the loss of sight, they also lost their only daughter.

Eleven years ago, the Bangos founded the Ambrelo Civic Association, which organizes "Look Through Our Eyes" educational concerts in schools and has so far had about thirty charity concerts, the yield of which they donated to support those whose situation is even worse than theirs. In its motivation cycle Concerts for Hope, Ambrelo allows young visually impaired singers to present their talent to the public. There are never enough events that would bring closer the world of people with disabilities to the public and fight against prejudices about their lives and aspirations. Therefore, each one of these events has a very high informative value.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF COLIN KAEPERNICK

TEXT: Martin PODHAJSKÝ | PHOTO: Brook WARD

It can be safely assumed that you have never heard of Colin Kaepernick. What may, however, be more important is the disturbing political grotesque which he last for from one week unwillingly started. Yet, you most likely have never heard of it either. Therefore, I will do my best to paint at least the outline of the picture to acquaint you with a story worthy of a political thriller.

For a long time, the United States of America have struggled to resolve the much-perceived inequality of treatment of ethnic groups by the police. The tension between the two sides especially escalated in the past few years, following a series of unfortunate events during which multiple cases of inadequate use of a firearm by a police officer resulted in deaths of unarmed African-Americans. Moreover, adding more salt to the wound, the approaching Presidential election with its unforeseen results could not have been more bitter for many of the abovementioned communities. Due to the rising tension and overall disgust, it didn't take long until even what had been meant to stay apolitical turned into the main stage for political pettiness: The National Football League.

One of the most resounding acts of silent protest for human rights during sporting events is undoubtedly the Black Power salute during the medal ceremony at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. However, the 2016 NFL preseason might as well join the 1968 event in the history books thanks to Colin Kaepernick, now former premiere NFL quarterback, who decided not to stand during the pregame national anthem to protest the seemingly politically-protected stigmatization of people of color. The act, however, raised extremely polarized response. On one hand, there were those who understood the urgency behind the simple act; on the other, those who took it for an insult to the symbols of American pride. As sociology professor Michael Eric Dyson explains, "Kaepernick has been accused of being unpatriotic, a traitor to the nation, a disruptive, self-aggrandizing narcissist, and a loathsome human being who disrespects the military."

During the final moments of the 2016 NFL preseason and the beginning of the regular season, several players followed Kaepernick's example and joined him in taking the knee or similar acts of silent protest. Following the election of Donald Trump, who

had even gone so far as to tell Kaepernick to "find a country that works better for him," as if showing that he does not even want to be everyone's president, the protests calmed down for a short while. However, this was only the calm before the storm, which followed the numerous hurricanes of 2017 in a similar fashion.

In Alabama on September 22, 2017, Donald Trump commented on the NFL players who had knelt during the national anthem in the following words: "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, 'Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out! He's fired. He's fired!'" In the same speech, Trump also advised all attendees of NFL games to leave the stadium in counter-protest in case anyone kneels. Even though this might not have had the desired effect regarding the masses, Vice President Mike Pence followed the advice to the letter, leaving the game between Colts and 49ers on October 8, 2017, after the 49ers took the knee during the national anthem. Moreover, every one of the numerous cases of last year's forms of silent protest in the NFL met with similar showcases of pettiness or worsening attacks from Trump and his sidekick. Sadly, the finely crafted, targeted and digitally marketed explanation of the protest as disrespectful to everything constituting Americanness is still winning likes on Twitter.

If LaVar Ball is the epitome of the word unbearable, Donald Trump and his sidekick are off-the-charts in that respect, especially regarding the NFL situation. The land-of-the-free America, the sports-hero-celebrating America has been turned upside down and reflected in the NFL as well as on the POTUS Twitter. With more and more athletes, coaches and other sports personnel joining in the not-so-silent-anymore Kaepernick-sparked protest, Donald Trump's twitterfingers need to be ready 24/7. Unfortunately, Kaepernick's NFL career seems to be over as politics rendered him undesirable, leading him to file a grievance against the League. Thus,



the curious case of Colin Kaepernick, 2017 GQ Citizen of the Year, would make for a perfect movie about the lack of freedom in free speech: A story about a man whose subtle protest turned America upside down.

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Ishiguro's Floating World

TEXT: Júlia ČÍŽOVÁ | PHOTOS: Frankie FOUANTHIN and Júlia ČÍŽOVÁ

The esteemed British writer Kazuo Ishiguro has won the Nobel Prize. The Academy appreciated his emotionally complex novels, which, according to them, combine Jane Austen and Franz Kafka. Readers and writers all over the world rejoice as Ishiguro humbly accepts the great honour and joins the pantheon of previous winners.

On 5 October 2017, the news broke that Kazuo Ishiguro had been awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. "...a very nice lady called from Sweden and asked me first of all if I would accept it ... I was surprised at how low-key they were, it was like they were inviting me to some kind of party." Before this happened, he believed that the news of him winning the Nobel Prize in literature was simply a hoax. Although being an outstanding writer, he was not a front-runner in bookmaking, with names like Margaret Atwood and Haruki Murakami leading the charts. His winning once again proved that the Academy's ways are mysterious and thus the winner is often a surprising choice.

After last year's controversy, when the winner turned out to be no one other than the American singer and songwriter Bob Dylan, it seems that the Academy opted for a more subtle choice. Although as unrelated as these two Nobel Prize winners may seem, the writer Sebastian Barry points out that "having given the prize last year to Bob Dylan, they have given this year's prize to Dylan's biggest fan."

Ishiguro is praised for his brilliant writing and his works have been translated into more than forty languages. He mostly concentrates on novels, though he also wrote short stories, screenplays and lyrics. Despite the fact that Ishiguro plays around with various genres, a historical novel, dystopian fiction, detective fiction, fantasy and more, all of his works have something that connects them, some quality that is only found in his prose. In the words of the Swedish Academy, he "...

in novels of great emotional force has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world." In his books, he delves into the themes of personal identity, memory, love, loss, self-deception, and "failings of human nature."

The announcement of his winning has sparked many reactions from his fellow writers, mostly positive. Ishiguro has a reputation of being a kind, hardworking person. In the words of his first editor, Robert McCrum, Ishiguro is "...witty, loving and discreet, with deep

reserves of wisdom and sympathy. In a frantic, fretful and unstable world, he is a voice of sanity, decorum, humanity and grace."

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki in 1954, but has lived in Britain since he was five years old. After finishing his studies at the University of Kent, where he studied English and Philosophy, he later gained his master's degree from the University of East Anglia's Creative Writing Course. This course is considered to be very prestigious and has produced many award-winning novelists.

What was young Ishiguro like? He took a gap year and travelled in America. "At that age, you keep pretending to strangers you are somebody else, it is a crash course in reinvention. Nobody knows you, so you are an introverted, sensitive person one day and a noisy, boozy, gonzo character the next." Ishiguro also dreamed of becoming a singer and a songwriter, but most of his demo tapes were met with rejection. "I used to see myself as some sort of musician type but there came a point when I thought: actually, this isn't me at

all. I'm much less glamorous. I'm one of these people with corduroy jackets with elbow patches. It was a real comedown."

So what is it about his books that captures and mesmerises readers all over the world?

Before I picked up any of his novels, I considered him to be one of those celebrated authors whose books everyone tells you to read, but you somehow end up not reading any of them. The prospect of going over the recollections of an aged butler did not seem particularly alluring to me, but once I finished *The Remains of the Day*, I couldn't help but be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of emotions bubbling underneath the surface of a man who seems impossibly uptight.

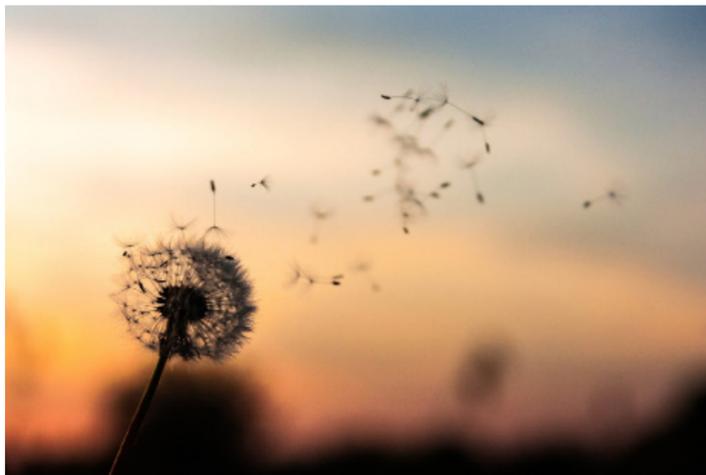
And indeed, one of the recurring themes in Ishiguro's books is suppressed feelings, which his characters carry and only rarely display. There is something in his novels that is profoundly touching. Perhaps it is the great restraint that he speaks of great emotions with. Ishiguro is the architect of immense personal dramas which lack screaming, wailing and hysterics. In *The Remains of the Day*, Mr Stevens, the

esteemed butler at Darlington Hall, manages to brick himself up behind his formal, stately demeanour and however much affection he may feel towards Miss Kenton, his feelings remain hidden. While Ishiguro's characters usually retain a very calm, dignified façade, behind it, they are stirred by a range of complex feelings.

Another crucial topic which Ishiguro often dissects in his novels is memory. His characters often find solace in their past and run to their memories in their most depressing moments. In *Never Let Me Go*, the narrator, Kathy, clings to her past life at her childhood boarding school so as to escape the present and the bleak future that awaits her. Axl and Beatrice, the main characters of *The Buried Giant*, consider memories to be a sort of corroboration of their happy married life. As soon as those memories start fading, they begin to feel uneasy, for what if their minds hide painful and dark memories of hurt and betrayal? Are some things best forgotten? What is the price of remembering? These are some of the questions that Ishiguro asks in his most recent book.

One of the first things you notice when reading a book by Ishiguro is his writing style. His manner of writing is very controlled; it may often seem that each of his sentences is constructed with immense care. Despite this, his prose flows easily. To me, reading his books is like sitting in a moving train, there are usually no sudden or jerking movements, just a steady, peaceful motion.

One of my favourite scenes in his 2005 novel *Never Let Me Go* is the one where the narrator, Kathy, pauses near a barren, empty field, enclosed by a barbed wire. She stands there and watches plastic bags and other debris caught in the fence, fluttering in the fierce wind. Kathy closes her eyes and imagines that this is the spot where all of the things she has ever lost linger. Despite being profoundly touched by this image, she's not sobbing dramatically. In a very Ishiguro-esque fashion, a few tears roll down her cheeks and then she quietly gets back into her car and drives away. And that is perhaps the essence of Ishiguro's fiction - the barbed wire catching the debris, the ephemeral fragments of memory, before they vanish in the never-ending field of oblivion.



Happy Birthday, Internet

TEXT: Sabina POLÁKOVÁ

The Internet has been part of our life for almost 50 years now. It was invented in the United States by the United States Department of Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency in order to connect computers and establish a network among them. As can be seen, the Internet that was invented for small expectations has been developed more than anybody at that time could have imagined. It is difficult to estimate its limits. Including the Deep Web, the Internet is expanding day by day and making its presence in our lives more and more felt. It is bringing great benefits and opening the doors to new worlds. It is giving us new opportunities for making money, making the sharing of information easier as well as diversifying our communication channels.

If you are an entrepreneur or a trader, the Internet is the best market for you. It does not matter what you sell or what you produce, once you join the Internet as a seller, you will have a chance to reach almost 50% percent of the world's population. This means that once we enter this world, we will have 3,790,812,758 potential customers. Even though it may seem that the competition is too tough, the Internet is always ready for new attempts and has an endless market. Jeff Bezos started his own book-selling business, and now he has a fortune. Mark Zuckerberg made an application similar to an intranet when he was a student, and now he knows all of us. These two are just famous examples of people who got rich thanks to the world-wide web. However, there are thousands of people who are making money by trading online. Moreover, there is one more thing we cannot ignore - Bitcoin, the internet's digital currency, invented by Satoshi Nakamoto.

The Internet is bigger than all the libraries around the world. Not only does it provide an access to a massive library, but it also lets us reach all the information we need fast. We can find any kind of information and tons of different sources seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day without any limit. We can compare all the sources and analyse them to get the best result. Some people think that the Internet is the centre of infollution (information pollution), but it is obvious that if we do not know how to search for the information we need, libraries could be mazes for us – places where we could get lost. The Internet gives

us a chance to get the information with a great speed. We do not need to turn the pages over and over again to find a few sentences we might need; everything is available at a click's distance.

Communication is a necessity in the current world, and the Internet meets our communication needs perfectly. There is no obstacle to getting news if something happens even 5,000 miles away from our home. We can get all the details live via the Internet. Most media have gone online. Most publishing houses do not publish paper newspapers anymore. They prefer to remain in existence as online newspapers, and the same goes for magazines. Also big TV channels are streaming their programmes and

their news online. Publishing houses tend to publish books as e-books to save money and reach more people. If we take a step back and consider our current communication channels, we can easily see that the Internet has beaten them all.

The Internet is a fifty-year-old galaxy that was invented in the United States and outgrew the boundaries of its continent several years after it was invented. The Internet is a galaxy that hosts more than three billion people. The galaxy has its own market where we can make money or get the products we need. The Internet is an endless library which includes quite a few of the documents that have been written so far. Thanks to the Internet, we have many different communication channels to connect people from all corners of the world.



Thinking Slovakness

TEXT: Michaela BUKVOVÁ

Hey, nice to meet you, and you're from...? Oh, Slovakia. Here some 'Is that in Europe?', 'Sooo, Czechoslovakia is not a country anymore?' in better cases follow; in worse, questions whether we eat with cutlery and already know what the Internet is. Well, at least they did a few years ago.

OK, so people don't know who we are and we're cool with that. We're even in on the jokes of confusing us with Slovenia and by ourselves produce T-shirts with 'Where the f*** is Bratislava?'

So, we got our own state and lived happily ever after. Or complacently would be a better word. Because we can get pretty grumpy as well. But on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of our statehood a riddle of a question started to pop up in my mind. What does it mean to me to be Slovak? What does it mean to Slovaks to be Slovak?

I must confess that when asked about my favourite Slovak films, books or personalities I get mute and try to throw an anchor in the past... miss, I preferred to ditch everything Slovak in history and literature classes. And then, after minutes of "try-hard" thinking, the whole existential character of our history

and literary works laid out in my head. For over a thousand years we have struggled with our own survival. Some might say that we have nothing to be proud of. That, after all, we gave nothing to the world. Well, very likely not under the label 'Slovak' with the merely quarter of a century of the country's presence. But to me, national pride is an illusion anyway, it feels false, it's like being proud to be born a human. And I realized that I am instead thankful.

Thankful that we now have our own place on the map with the staple of its actual citizens, and that gives us voice. We now get to decide what game we're going to play with our finances, land and resources. We are creating our history and shaping our future now. And from that stems some sort of confidence, which allows to act independently. However, to Slovaks this was the privilege of kings and to many it still is...

A foreign friend of mine once told me, "You Slovaks here live like a big content village, not bothered much by what is going on outside your households, let alone the borders." Thinking of it, he hit the white.

As if it were not in our nature to want more, to push forward, we rely on others to take care of us. And if we act, we do so silently without any sense of community. Many are more than eager to leave the country in search of more money or a higher living standard. A small review of Svätopluk's lesson about three branches would be handy. We could perhaps start to think outside the individual self and give the word 'collective' its original positive connotation.

Still it needs to be said that even though it took a little while for Slovaks to realize what democracy and having a voice actually means, there's a light at the end of the tunnel peeping through already. The braindrain

phenomenon is easing down, people are coming back with the romantic vision of making their country a better place, finally seeing the opportunities of a greenfield. In recent years Slovaks have been up in arms for a common cause quite a few times, especially the young are unafraid to speak up and take action. The last regional elections showed that we are no longer indifferent to our destiny.

It seems that Jozef Mak has got his schooling and is no longer willing to suffer in silence, he now knows what he wants and that makes living in this country even more pleasant and promising.



Hello, City, My Old-New Friend

TEXT: Michaela BUKVOVÁ

These days that the first world has moved on to satiating its more luxurious needs, it has become evident that in order to live a more pleasant and better quality life, we have to think about the way we build our cities.

It is not merely a matter of looks or feelings. Despite the high level of globalisation, each city has to deal with problems of its own. From rethinking high-rise buildings after the Grenfell Tower fire, through considering putting up barriers along pavements to prevent further van attacks to questions such as: (How) Should the night life of cities be managed? (Seriously, night managers do exist.) How to stop cities from sprawling and make them more compact? The Netherlands' water management certainly came out as more than inspiring in the aftermath of the squander that hurricanes inflicted upon America.

These are some contemporary issues that architects and urban planners ponder upon, giving developers hard time. The concept of urbanism is far from new, but in the modern history it's more about problem-solving rather than planning in itself. Industrialisation, motorisation and cosmopolitanisation have caused as much harm as they did good. To put it shortly, lessons have been learned. And many now quote the then criticised 1960s urban activist Jane Jacobs. She sparked what is called 'the New Urbanism' movement. In her most prominent work 'The Death and Life of Great American Cities', she proposes four basic principles on which towns and cities should be planned. Firstly, a city should blend different uses – industrial, commercial, institutional, residential rather than create separate categorised boxes. Secondly, blocks should be short to make pedestrian transfer easier. Thirdly, she claims that variety is necessary – something old... something new... And lastly, she views density as a good thing that should be encouraged. To her, pavements are city's veins – life 'happening' and life sustaining sets of spots where one can ask for directions, get advice or be pleased by the sight of a puppy or a joyous child. But first of all, they are the place where people should feel safe. Lovable, isn't it? And not necessarily an impossible utopia. Walk through the streets of Budapest and you will see what she had on her mind.

Bratislava and the New Urbanism are yet getting to know each other. Despite popular belief, there

was urban thinking and efforts to make Bratislava a modern metropolis under the old regime. In contrast to their egalitarian convictions, however, the comrades didn't ask people for their opinion. They didn't know how much people hated the concrete brutalist colossi. And then after the fall of the Berlin Wall, allocation of money to renovation, replanning and cultivation seemed as an unnecessary luxury to a new state with broken economy and sky-high inflation. Followed by an era where investors were praised as gods and were always given their way no matter how inappropriate their plans seemed to be. As a result, poor little Bratislava was left with many a scar.

Things are not all gloom and doom, though. People found and raised their voices, showed their dissatisfaction and created ways of holding a dialogue with the authorities as well as the developers. There are now several initiatives that call for 'livable' vibrant districts, cycle lanes, wider pavements and parks with social media playing an enormous part in all of that. In light of Jane Jacobs' teachings, a handful of young architects and activists in support of two of the biggest financial groups in Slovakia are now developing a project of 'Nové Lido' on the south bank of the Danube River. Their idea is to make the new district walkable, easily accessible, and should stimulate human contact. The most beautiful and interesting things are supposed to be on the eye level. Moreover, this project would stretch out the size of the already walkable Old Town.

We all, however, are urbanists to a certain extent, we all define the life in the streets of Bratislava – yes, unknowingly, but Bratislava not only has scars that we have to wait for architects to mend. The problem of most post-socialist countries are also so called residual plots. Tiny pieces of land that belong to all and no-one and so nobody takes care of them. Some individuals took notice of them and decided to reclaim them. Simple mowing, or cutting of grass, putting in some plants completely changes the look of the surroundings. Similarly, the wooden podium around the building of the Faculty of Arts was fixed and painted by such thoughtful people. We can join forces and look around for some initiatives in our cities and towns or initiate some ourselves. Little goes a long way and in this style we all could help Bratislava stand up on her feet and make our towns thrive in no time.



TEXT: Sabina POLÁKOVÁ | PHOTO: Courtesy of Mladi!Info

Erasmus, but not for the whole semester. Foreigners, but also Slovaks. Volunteering, but not just feeding homeless people. Abroad, but also the home country. Travelling, but not spending a lot of money. You are no longer a student? Nobody cares. These are just some ways of describing Erasmus plus projects that you can easily become a part of. If you are interested in following your traveller's heart, don't hesitate to read more.



Ivana Petriskova, Project Coordinator of the local office Mladiinfo Slovensko and a former EVS volunteer, who decided to dedicate her time and energy to this youth organisation, agreed to share some more information about this platform.

Can you tell me a little more about this organisation?

Mladiinfo started in Macedonia as an online platform for young people that couldn't afford to get a solid education. So the basic idea behind the project is to offer access to any educational opportunities to young

people that are from a disadvantaged environment. Mladiinfo Slovensko is the first branch of the Mladiinfo network. It was created in 2010, and we mostly focus on volunteering, hosting, sending, coordinating as well as on youth exchanges and trainings for young people.

Can you describe the projects you're working on? The opportunities that students or young people can find, for example, online? What can we get from this organisation?

You can take part in the European Voluntary Service

(EVS), which has been our main focus for the past seven years. It is a program for young people between the ages of 18 and 30. To be eligible, you don't have to be a student, you can just be a young person up to 30. The project is funded by the European Commission and is a part of the Erasmus plus package, which a lot of people know as a student exchange between universities, but it is more than that. You can also participate in shorter trainings or exchanges, which last for from one week up to several months, or short-term EVS. Everything is covered, so you don't have to care about money that much. You don't pay any fees, you get reimbursements for all your expenses, of course according to the rules of the European Commission. Usually there is a limit for reimbursements (talking about youth exchanges or training courses), but you can very easily fit into that limit.

Do you offer anything for students or children here in Slovakia as well?

Yes. Here in Slovakia we also organise our own youth exchanges or training courses, so young people here can also participate in these and here in our office in Bratislava we have a one-year programme for local students. They can volunteer for us, and in return for their help, they get access to the exchanges and events that we organise. Another thing that we started recently is a cultural language exchange.

Yes, I've heard about "Learn and share." Can you tell me more about this?

Of course. It is a one-year-long educational programme for local students. They can set their own goals, what they want to improve, what they want to learn, and we provide them with the space for their development.

Is it easy for everybody to get the access, to become a part of Mladi!nfo? How can we become members of Mladi!nfo?

There is a call for members every September, so people can easily apply. There is usually an online application, where you answer a few questions about yourself, what you want to do, how you want to contribute to our organisation. We usually select 2 or 3 students. However, this is just one of the programmes. If anybody wants to help, they can be a part of some event, of course.

And are there any training courses or youth exchanges

in Slovakia which people can currently apply for?

Next month we are going to organise a youth exchange in Modra. We have 5 Slovaks who will be a part of the exchange, but it is mostly about international people coming to Slovakia. Thirty people from different countries are going to be a part of a project called International Volunteering.

Is there any age limit for the participants?

Anybody between the ages of 17-18 and 30 is eligible (35 years of age is the limit for the team leader.)

What is the project about?

It is about volunteering. Any kind of volunteering: national, international... volunteering that can encourage young people to do something and be active in their environment. We also plan to engage the people who have done volunteering, to talk to them, and also possibly visit some organisations which deal with volunteering in Slovakia. They will prepare some presentations for local schools.

At the beginning you mentioned EVS, which is your main focus. Can you tell us a bit more about it?

The basic information can be found on our webpage: European Voluntary Service. There is also a database where people can complete a form according to their interests, by the country and the topic and they can see what opportunities are currently available for them. They will find an organisation that could host them, and we can send them as we are an accredited sending organisation. We also have partnerships with some organisations where we look for volunteers directly. Once participants get accepted, we as the sending organisation help them set up everything.

Is there anything else you would like to say to the future Mladiinfo people?

As I've mentioned, there is also a new programme - this language school that we have just opened. We are hoisting volunteers who running courses in their mother language, whether it is Turkish, Spanish, Italian, English, or Macedonian. It is a great opportunity for local people or local students to get to know other cultures and other languages. The courses are held in the University Cultural Centre in Mlynská dolina during the whole semester. So don't hesitate to join us!

Meet a Unicyclist

TEXT: Marek HUDÁK | PHOTO: Courtesy of Miloš BAKAĽÁR

I have a friend who has a very interesting and unusual hobby. His name is Miloš Bakaľár, he is 23 years old and lives in Hanušovce nad Topľou, the district of Vranov nad Topľou in the far east of our country. This hobby of his is called unicycling.



Unicycling is one of the newest sports out there. It has only existed for about fifteen years or so, but it has gotten a lot of attention in the last couple of years, although primarily in countries like France, Germany, or the USA. It is great for exercising the body and relaxing the mind. But beware, it is very difficult to learn and almost impossible to master.

As its name suggests, the sport is about performing various tricks on a unicycle, a device constructed from one wheel joined to a frame upon which there is a seat mounted. Naturally you get a pair of pedals attached to it as well. You might have seen something similar in museums or some old silent movies. Those machines were invented in the late nineteenth century and were called penny-farthing, and there were performers riding these "unicycles" at circuses, although those contraptions also had a small wheel to accompany the bigger ones; therefore, they were more like mutated bicycles. Of course, the modern unicycling has been

inspired by those old big-wheeled monstrosities.

But things have changed since then. Modern unicycles are much smaller and built in such a way that allows for various kinds of tricks and activities to be performed on them.

My friend Miloš has been training on his unicycle for over seven years now. He is already extremely skilled in it, but still far from reaching his maximum potential. Since this sport is not too wide spread in our country yet, Miloš is one of just a few unicyclists from Slovakia, and I am not afraid to say that he is probably the best of them. Such a sport requires decades of constant training in order to achieve truly amazing results.

But as is usual with most other sports, even in this one you have to choose what you want to specialize in. The same as with football or hockey players, who have to stick to one role on the ice or on the field so that they can focus on it and become as good as possible in that role in order to have a chance to defeat their

opponents.

In unicycling, there are many categories or disciplines that you can train and compete in. There are two major competitions regarding unicycling: Unicon (short for the World Unicycle Championship), which takes place every two years and in which competitors from all around the world are allowed to compete, and EUC (European Unicycle Championship), which is held twice a year (winter and summer) and is only designated for European unicyclists. The EUC always takes place in a different European city and lasts for four days.

There are five disciplines you can compete in at the EUC:

1. Flatland Unicycling (tricks on a flat surface)
2. Street Unicycling (like parkour but on a unicycle)
3. Trial Unicycling (tricks on pallets and handrails)
4. High Jump (jumping as high as possible)
5. Long Jump (jumps at a distance)

Most unicyclists do not attend these competitions purely for the chance of winning them; they are the occasions on which these people connected through this unconventional sport can meet, enjoy each other's company and talk about their favourite hobby. The winner doesn't receive any financial reward, just a small statue representing his victory.

Miloš only competed in the EUC in Berlin last year. He took the eleventh place out of forty-five, which is quite a respectable accomplishment, especially because it was his first attempt at this competition. His next step is to compete at Unicon 2018 in Seoul, South Korea. He competes in the Flatland discipline, which has improved a lot in the last five years. To become the best in this discipline is an extremely demanding goal, since most unicyclists tend to choose it, and the number of the tricks one can perform on the flat surface is essentially infinite.

At the Flatland competition, all riders have to first go through the qualification round, where they have one minute to show their best tricks. The judges then choose sixteen best riders.

Those then create eight competing pairs, in each of which competitors go one on one, performing the tricks alternately. Each winner then advances into the semifinals. This play-off lasts until there are only two competitors left. Those two then go against each other in a so-called "battle". The one with the best tricks performed in the battle then wins the whole Flatland division of the competition.

Beside competing, Miloš also tries to spread the awareness about the sport through the exhibition shows where he, among other various artists, performs his art in front of hundreds of people in the audience.

Miloš has come a long way to get to the level of skill he is at. He truly gives everything into his passion. He works on his tricks four times a week in a school gymnasium during the cold months or out in parking lots early in the morning during the warmer seasons. Besides that, he has to keep up his physical conditioning at the peak level by attending a fitness center several times a week as well. There he trains for the explosiveness and strength required to be the best at what he does and loves.

I am sure we will hear a lot about Miloš in the coming years as he perfects his techniques and as unicycling is getting more and more international attention.



The end of winter in a hygge style

TEXT: Ružena MICHALIGOVÁ | PHOTOS: pixabay.com



Many people who see this word for the first time spend minutes speculating what its pronunciation is like. Afterwards they wonder what its meaning is. Good news. Nobody really cares about either of these problems as long as they are able to feel it, to live it. As the good old Winnie the Pooh said about love - you don't spell it, you feel it. The same works for the word "hygge". So let's find out what the whole hygge phenomenon stands for.

Light

Lighting is crucial for the hygge feeling. A strong aggressive neon light is a no-no. Instead, use a mild light of a low frequency and add candles to it. A lot of candles! It is advised to use a minimum of five candles in one room to get the desired atmosphere. Of course, we should be reasonable when using candles, not leaving them without supervision and letting enough air come inside, but leaving all the stress, anxiety and tension behind. Those feelings are

not known in the hygge world.

Blankets, cushions

While it is still a winter time, let's get warmed up by covering ourselves in a pile of blankets and cushions. The fluffier they are, the better. Do not limit yourself to a certain number. Use as many as you have a space and a budget for.

Cosy corner

If you live in a dormitory, this point may be a bit more challenging for you, as you live in one room. However, if you have the opportunity, create a "cosy corner". It will be sort of your shelter. A place you can go to after a tough day at school or where you can indulge in reading your favourite book. And definitely use blankets and cushions for creating it.

Food

A carrot or an Oreo cookie. What do you think is more hygge? An Oreo cookie, no doubt. Hygge is not about controlling every single calorie you consume. It is about enjoying what you eat. If you feel like having a cookie, have a cookie. Without feeling guilty. What is even better, though, is making the food you eat by yourself. Make the effort and spend some time preparing the cake you love so much. It is easier to buy it in a bakery next door, of course, but it is not hygge at all. So, let's take flour, eggs and milk and start baking!

Friends, family

There is a saying that goes, "Happiness is only real when shared". Therefore, spare some of your free time for your family and friends. Invite them over for a game night, or go together for a trip, or just have a chill out evening watching a movie. Whatever you all enjoy, make it happen. Sometimes it may be difficult to leave that cosy corner you have created, but also try to keep good relations with those you love. Make memories which nobody will take away from you and which will warm up your heart whenever you get back to them.

A "hygge" week Challenge

Day 1

Grab a cosy blanket and watch a movie (don't forget to light up the candles!).

Day 2

Take an evening walk without your phone.

Day 3

Read a book with a hot drink (a hot tea, a coffee, a Granko ;))

Day 4

Ask a friend or a group of friends for some activity. Go out for a beer, or watch a movie with a microwave-made popcorn together or play Activity. Whatever you do, just spend the time together.

Day 5

Choose your favourite song. Lie on your bed, make yourself comfy. Play the song. Close your eyes and just listen. Listen to every single beat, every single word. Cherish the moment.

Day 6

Wake up earlier than usual. Have a slow-paced morning. When you wake up, do a little stretch in the bed. Make yourself a breakfast which you will enjoy slowly. No phone, no PC, no TV. Just you and your morning time.

Day 7

Reward yourself with a piece of your favourite cake. If you eat it inside, prepare the surroundings first. Tidy up the table, light up the candles, put on some music (Spotify has "hygge" playlists!) and serve yourself the cake, nicely decorated on a plate. Bon appétit!



The Big Sister Is Watching You

TEXT: Michaela BUKVOVÁ

When you think Moscow, you very likely think the candy-like domes of St. Basil's Cathedral. Outside of Red Square, however, the city's defining feature are seven look-alike high-rise buildings – The Seven Sisters, the so called 'Vysotki'. At the sight of them, with their sleek yet complex outline, it can be difficult to place them on the time line. Nonetheless, they are a symbol of an era. Of an empire's heyday as well as an era full of terror. A symbol of a nation's victory over fascism. Getting the drift yet?



Ministry of Foreign Affairs | Author: Erik Charlton/Wikipedia

Two years after the war, Moscow was celebrating its 800th birthday, the Soviets held the status of a super power and their capital could proud itself on a complex metro system with marvellous cathedral-like stations. All the same, over the horizon the city was a medieval romance of monastery spires while the 'hostile' capitalism was churning out buildings with height records. Something had to be changed, the winning power needed a representative city, representative of not only the USSR itself, but let's face it, of the whole ideologically interconnected Eastern Block. As a result, the caring then general secretary came up with a great gift –



An apartment building | Author: Alx0yago/Wikipedia

a group of monumental buildings that would thoroughly change the face of Moscow for many years to come.

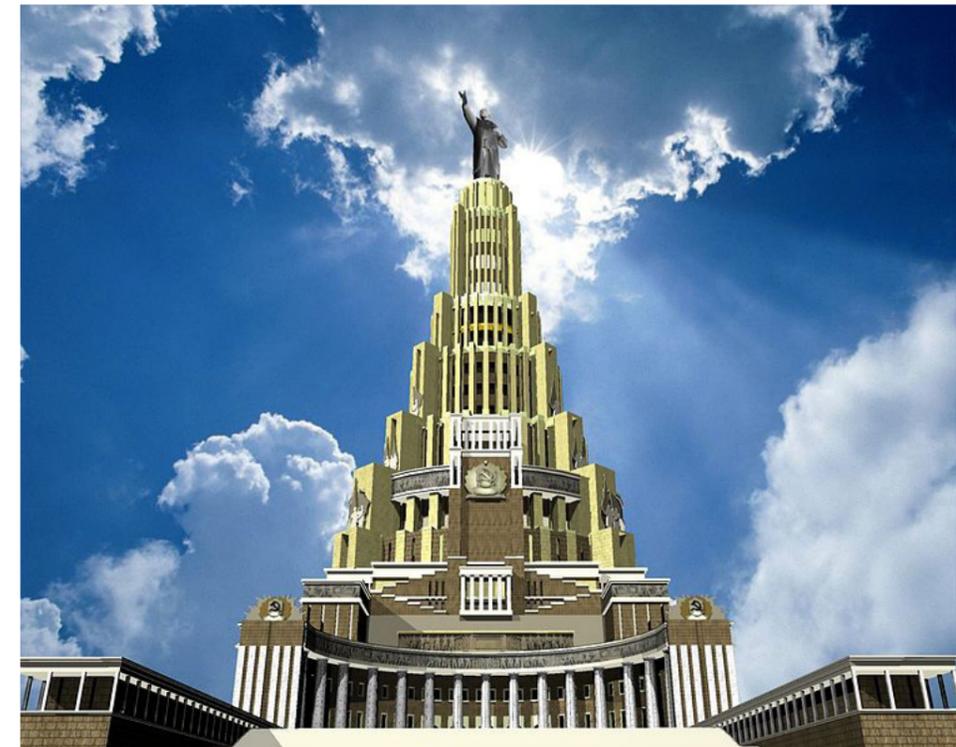
Architects and engineers from around the country flocked into Moscow only to present their ideas. The task was clear: the planned constructions should build upon the Russian architectural tradition and on projections of a pre-war planned colossal construction, the Palace of Soviets. On the other hand, they were by no means to imitate the foreign motives (understand Manhattan's skyscrapers). What was definitely traditionally Russian was the use of stone and colours – white and red. Also compulsory spires were ordered by Stalin to distinguish the buildings from New York's high-rise buildings and, obviously, all of them feature communist symbols – either the



Moscow State University | Author: Dmitry A. Mottl/Wikipedia

five-pointed star with the wreath or the hammer and sickle. In spite of this all, whether we want it or not, we are constantly influenced by what we see and that's why resemblance with the already existing towering constructions was inevitable.

The works began on 7 September 1947, lasting for ten years. It needs to be said, however, that the individual buildings were finished in two years, with the exception of the vast Moscow State University – a pace rather remarkable even in today's terms. 'Vysotki' were advancing fast skyward, the smallest, a hotel at Leningradskaya, stopped at 136m (446.2ft), the tallest, the future Moscow State University, continued to grow to 240m (787.4ft), holding Europe's height record up to 1990. The construction was far from easy, for Stalin also had another requirement. Each building was carefully placed on a map and could not be moved, not even by a yard. What's so mind-boggling about this is that all of those sites spread over the meeting points of tectonic plates. Here is another tidbit: when you connect opposite-standing buildings, you'll get a star sign meeting in one point – the place where originally the 495 m tall Palace of Soviets was supposed to stand (now, the site of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour). And hence, the Stalinist Empire Style was born.



Palace of Soviets | Author: Ilya Ilusenko/Wikipedia

Not knowing much about Stalinist architecture, one might get a feeling of utopia. The buildings are grandiose, laboriously embellished with Gothic pinnacles and Baroque decor, gilded, marbled and, well, awe-inspiring in its proper sense – as well as unsuitably secular. The style is a far cry from what was being built in other countries at that time. If you, however, haven't set your foot on Moscow's ground and

they still look pretty familiar, it's because cities like Kiev, Prague or Warsaw took some inspiration from Stalin's Sisters later on.

Because of their height, they honestly feel omnipresent; therefore, if you ever ramble around the streets of Moscow, mind that one of the Big Sisters is no doubt watching you. My recommendation: have no fear, Stalin has been long dead and buried, and this is the better part of his legacy, so instead, feast your eyes on its profane splendour.

A Trip to Cuba

TEXT: Marek HUDÁK | PHOTOS: Michal MARCINKO

Traveling is one of the most popular hobbies. Today, it is no longer uncommon to travel to exotic countries, about which we could, until recently, only read in travel magazines. However, there is a country we have not heard much about or, in other words, our information about it could have been distorted thanks to its political system. That country is Cuba. My friend Michal, a medical student in Halle, Germany, visited it and gave me this interesting interview afterwards.



ATLANTIC COAST

Why Cuba?

My acquaintances traveled to Cuba on holiday and had one more vacancy. They approached me and I joined them. I had always fancied the Caribbean. We spent eight days in the holiday resort of Varadero and one day on a sightseeing tour of Havana.

What were your first impressions?

The first and biggest surprise for us was cars in Cuba. Old Russian cars (Lada, Moscow) and old American cars (Chevrolet, Ford, Plymouth, Dodge, and many others), often held together by the force of will and also thanks to parts of old jigulis. They were wonderful to look at. They were everywhere, and there were lots of them. Many of them serve as private taxis.

I do not understand. Socialist Cuba is allowed to do business?

Cuba is going through immense change. Under the reign of Fidel Castro, there was an American embargo, but Cuba survived thanks to trade with the socialist

block. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a period of great economic depression, the so-called "Periodo especial", began. Imports of oil fell rapidly, transport was paralyzed, industry and agriculture as well, and there was shortage of food. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez helped Cuba at that time. The Cubans, however, became hardened because of this difficult period. They learned how to survive, how to make use of whatever opportunity there is, and how to get what they need.

After Fidel's death, his brother Raul came to power, allowing people to start their own businesses, to travel, to get access to the internet, and more. At the same time, however, huge differences have begun to emerge in the population.

How do these differences manifest themselves?

Most Cubans live in extremely modest conditions. Simple dwellings, an average salary of about 20-30 EUR, an insufficient amount of food, the impossibility of traveling around the world, buying a car, surfing the



CARS IN CUBA

internet, traveling in air-conditioned buses, staying in beautiful hotels, eating in restaurants for foreigners. The world of tourists and the world of natives are fairly strictly separated and rarely overlap. Even money is double: the convertible currency CUC for foreigners and the domestic currency CUP for local ones. On the other hand, the Cubans do not pay any rent, the energy is very cheap, they get food rations, employees of state-owned enterprises and institutions (most Cubans) do not pay taxes.

In the USA, especially in Florida, which is 150 km away from Cuba, there live many Cubans that provide financial support to their relatives back in Cuba. Thanks to this, some Cubans have such well-designed

houses that they can rent them to tourists or they can afford to buy a car and use it as a taxi. Imagine that a family that has lived off \$50 a month so far gets the same amount in an hour of taxi-driving tourists. Who knows what this will do to these people. However, it is not only the job of a taxi driver that is well-paid. It is also profitable for them to rent their home to tourists. However, such a house, so-called "casa particular", must meet certain standards (cleanliness, hot water, air conditioning, refrigerator, etc.) and is

regularly checked. Its owner has to keep strict records and pay taxes.

What else surprised you about Cuba?

An interesting phenomenon is the internet. Free wi-fi is relatively difficult to find. Hotels usually have wi-fi, but only at the reception and for around EUR 1.5/hour. However, I was more shocked by the fact that it was not possible to use USB keys in hotel-based PCs designated for guests. They just did not have any ports for them. And it was not a coincidence, they explained to us that USB keys are simply not to be used.

But there is one interesting thing about Cuba, which also surprised us.

Hitchhiking supported by the state. The reason is a very poor traffic situation, a lack of local buses and trains. The cost of transport is very low, but the means of transport are overcrowded, overheated, and they are often late, so not to be relied on. Locals who need transport, therefore, meet on pre-determined places on roads and motorways, often assisted by the poice. They stop cars (state, business, etc.), and, if they have vacant seats, they fill them with hitchhikers. Another very widespread form of travel is the transport of people, especially workers to work, in trucks. However, this mode of transport is also not very reliable because the cars stop as needed, and they are not therefore very punctual.



YELLOW COCO TAXIS - POPULAR AND AFFORDABLE



LOCAL BELLES IN COLORFUL OUTFITS

What is nature like in Cuba? Did you visit any interesting places?

Beautiful! Varadero has gorgeous beaches, the sea is very warm, and exotic fruits – bananas, coconuts, mangoes, avocados and pineapples – grow there. We chose Havana for a trip, and we were excited about it. There are bands in the streets that you are amazed to listen to, and brightly, bizarrely dressed women, who don't mind being taken a picture of, are walking along the streets... But both of them will then come to you and ask for a reward. Each guide also takes tourists to bars: in this Hemingway drank his mojito, in this his daiquiri... And tourists get the same drink there, what a surprise...

It is impossible to overlook all the socialist monuments and museums, but everywhere it feels lively, energetic and joyful. The Cubans are a happy and obviously carefree people. They adore their revolutionary Che Guevara and have his portrait



CUBAN WOMEN LIKE POSING, BUT THEY IMMEDIATELY ASK FOR MONEY

on t-shirts, cups, pictures, and on the walls of their homes. Interestingly, the same is not true for Castro. Allegedly, because he was so modest that he himself did not want it.

We traveled through Varadero several times - by bus, taxi (beautiful pink Ford from 1927), Coco taxi (yellow motorcycle for 3 people with a roof) and also on horseback. In addition to a dozen marketplaces, we were attracted by two estates that are close to each other, but far removed with regards to their character: the house of Al Capone, the crime boss, is freely accessible, very beautiful and located directly on the seashore. The weekend house of Raúl Castro is very



PORTRAITS OF JOSÉ MARTI AND CHE GUEVARA ARE EVERYWHERE

strictly guarded, and there is nothing visible through the huge fence.

How about the double currency in Cuba?

We have exchanged our euros for a convertible currency CUC and paid with it wherever we needed to. Interestingly, it was rarely possible to pay with a Visa card. I tried it only once, in a clothing store, because I did not have enough cash. It was a horror. They took me to the office, I had to submit not only a card but also a passport and fill out a long form. Then they took a long time to verify my VISA card and only then allowed me to

pay some 40 euros with it. We did not come in contact with the CUP currency since we would not even be able to spend it anywhere. We did not even see the grocery stores in which the locals buy their food. Everywhere there were only generously stocked shops for tourists where you could only pay with euros, dollars or CUCs.

Would you like to return to this country?

Certainly yes, but I would not go with a travel agency but rather on my own. Many people rent a car after their arrival and visit interesting places of the island, of which there are many. I would stay in a *casa particular* and spend more time interviewing the locals to learn more about their real everyday life, about their joys and their hardships as well. Hotel staff, understandably, kept their distance. I can imagine it must have been very hard for them to see how some of the guests wasted their food. Because only relatively recently, there was a shortage of food, and who knows what is the current situation like. That's why we tried very hard to take only as much food as we were able to eat, and we subliminally had some respect for those people. Originally, I wanted to visit Mexico in the Caribbean, but even though Cuba was on a much lower service level than other holiday destinations are, I am very glad to have decided to go there. It never hurts to get to know another view of life, another culture. It is always enriching for a person.



HEMINGWAY'S FAVORITE FLORIDITA BAR

MARseille

“You either love it or hate it”

TEXT AND PHOTOS: Ružena MICHALIGOVÁ

Some call it the northernmost city of Africa; some still know it mainly for its criminal history, drugs, immigrants, and dirt. Even though Marseille is not a typical tourist destination, it has gone through many changes during the last decade. Together with Košice, it was the European Capital of Culture in 2013; in 2016 it hosted UEFA Euro 2016, and in 2017 it was the European Capital of Sport. Even the famous Tour de France held one of its stages in the city last summer. People stop by in Marseille because it is on their way to another destination, or because there is a direct train line Paris - Marseille. Despite being slightly underestimated, this city has a lot of hidden treasures which will be revealed only to those who dare to explore.



LA BONNE MERE

This southern city has its own vibe. People are relaxed, friendly, and sometimes even excessively friendly. Especially pale European women can find it disturbing at times, when they have all the attention of the local men who have no trouble talking to them even if they start speaking Slovak or another little spoken language. Marseille is a city where people of different origins and cultures live beside



COURS JULIEN

one another, which proves that such a co-existence is possible, even in today's times when the question of immigrants and refugees is highly discussed.

Marseille is a port city and therefore markets are a must. The Vieux Port (Old Port) is a centre of the city and local fishermen sell their daily catches there. And because they do not tend to catch the same fish every time they go fishing, it is a nice surprise to see which fish is available



LE PANIER

on the particular day when you decide to go shopping. There are other stalls, too, offering mainly souvenirs, food or clothes. The main city souvenir is Savon de Marseille (a soap made in Marseille), which you will find everywhere. There is another market place which is worth mentioning and seeing once you are in Marseille. It is called Noilles and this place is a world on its own. The sellers of different cultures and races

are competing for people's attention so they can sell them their vegetables and fruits and be better than their selling rival. You will also notice illegal sellers of cigarettes as well as different aromas of fast food. Noilles is a place where nationalities, voices, smells and dirt all mix together.

In spite of Marseille being the second largest city of France,



VALLON DES AUFFES

you can see all the main sights in a day. From whichever direction you enter Marseille, the first thing that will catch your attention will be the main symbol of the city - The Notre Dame de la Garde. It is a Christian basilica called La Bonne Mère (The Good Mother) by locals. The official name is related to the statue of Saint Marie which stands on the top of the basilica and looks



LES CALANQUES

Bilingualism

A Tool for a Better Future?

TEXT: Sabina POLÁKOVÁ | PICTURE: Markus Koljonen

Bilingualism or being bilingual could simply be defined as being able to speak and understand two languages. Related to this definition, there is a misconception that bilingual people are supposed to know both languages very well and they should be good at writing, speaking, listening and reading. Bilinguals do not have to speak both languages equally well. This misconception can decrease bilinguals' confidence, and it might also reduce the benefits of being bilingual: better job opportunities, no language problems while traveling and new perspectives.

Since competition in the job market is growing every day, being bilingual can boost your resume. It can not only help you get a job abroad, but it can also give you many opportunities to find a job in your own country with understanding that most companies in the twenty-first century require job applicants to speak a second language. In addition, if a bilingual person wants to work abroad, his language skills can help him get over many problems related to language. Foreign job markets for bilingual people are getting bigger every day: there are a lot of teaching jobs, customer care jobs as well as jobs in the service industry. This means that there are more and more job opportunities for bilingual people.

Bilingual people can discover the world more easily than monolinguals. When they want to travel around the world, they do not have language difficulties. As we know, a language barrier is the scariest thing when we decide to travel somewhere and, unfortunately, it may discourage many people from travelling. There is no language barrier for bilingual people. They do not hesitate to approach new people on their journeys to make new friendships, which can let them discover local people

and places better.

Based on researches, we can say that bilinguals see the world differently. Since each language has its own character, when you speak your second language, you become a bit different. Each language makes you choose words carefully to be understood correctly in a society which speaks the language, and each language has its own structure rules that determine your thinking. When you switch the language, you also

need to change the way of thinking. Being able to do this can show you that you are able to perceive things in a different way, see the world in a new light, from a different perspective.

Being able to use two languages, or being bilingual, makes your life easier and gives you many opportunities. As a bilingual, you do not have to worry about the language barrier when you want to see new places around the world. Since your resume is stronger than that of a monolingual and since

the job market for bilinguals is getting bigger, you can choose your job instead of waiting for being chosen by an employer. Moreover, becoming bilingual brings new perspectives; you see the world differently and understand people from other cultures better.



MUCEM

over the sailors and fishermen of the city as well as over the whole city of Marseille. The basilica is built on the highest hill of the city (154 m) and therefore provides a great view of the whole Marseille. It is popular with tourists coming to the city. Le Panier, the old city, is another desirable place to see. If people think about Marseille as not being very "French", then Le Panier proves them wrong. Narrow streets, flower pots on window sills, tiny restaurants, people drinking coffee while reading a book. This is a place to chill out and to escape the crowd of the Vieux Port.

MUCEM is a newly built Mediterranean museum which is worth seeing. If not from the inside, at least from the outside. The facade of the building is spectacular and unique. There is a bridge joining this

building with the historical Fort Saint Jean, which can be perceived as a metaphor for joining the new and the old and creating a harmony between them.

Art-loving and free-spirited people will find their place, too. Cours Julien is a place rich in street art. It is a very lively district where groups of youngsters hang out or where mothers go with their offsprings.

Football fans will surely know the Olympic Marseille – the team for which the city lives. Their base is Orange Velodrome Stadium, which is located further away from the city centre, but a subway line will take you there in a few minutes.

Marseille is not a representative seaside resort full of beautiful beaches and cocktail bars. However, you will find places where you can cool yourself down in the (almost always) hot and humid weather. Marseille is known as the sunniest place in France and therefore the water of the sea is an essential part of your stay in the city. The nearest beach to the city centre is La Plage des Catalans. It is small in size, but it has two parts to choose from - one sandy beach and one rocky part where you have to be careful when descending or jumping into the sea. Generally nicer are Les Plages du Prado which stretch alongside the Promenade Corniche. The beaches are either sandy or pebbly. One place you cannot miss when exploring the city's beaches is Vallon des Auffes. It is a tiny old port with a viaduct-like bridge and colourful houses. You may go for a swim and afterwards have a delicious meal in one of the recognized restaurants there. Fonfon is a name in Marseille, especially known for the typical Marseille soup which is called bouillabaisse, and if you are a pizza lover, you must make a reservation in Chez Jeannot. The Mediterranean Sea from this side is quite cold, so do not have too high expectations for the temperature of the water. But, once again, it is a pleasant cooling down spot during hot summer days.

Last but not least, Les Calanques. A natural miracle, a breath-taking oasis of magic. If you decide to take a walk, you need to reserve a day for this (the walk itself does not take so long, but once you reach the shore, you want to spend some time there and enjoy the moment), but there is also a possibility of a boat ride. However, in windy weather, sea-sickness can ruin the whole experience.

This is Marseille. The city of sunshine, people of all races, friendliness, markets and a smell of baguettes and croissants, of course!

Lady Bird

TEXT: Simona BAJÁKOVÁ

The abundance of coming-of-age films and books that exist in the world is ridiculous, but despite knowing this, I always end up being utterly charmed by them. If you're like me and if you like to get a little sentimental while watching good films about growing up, don't miss *Lady Bird*'s release this year.

Lady Bird is a story of Christine "Lady Bird" McPherson, a simple girl from Sacramento, California, with an attitude and her hair dyed pink, who has to go to a Catholic school because her brother saw someone get shot in his regular state school (or something along those lines) and has a lovingly antagonistic relationship with her mother. She is everyone's slightly rebellious teenage-self personified and running free. And when she faux-patiently insists on being called "Lady Bird" through gritted teeth by literally everyone around her several times in the span of the first 5 minutes, we immediately grasp what the film is going to be about: a girl growing up, figuring herself out.

In *Lady Bird*, growing up is not full of world-shattering realizations and drama, but rather feels like a light-hearted memory already, despite being still in progress. We can see a girl going through her senior year in high school and it's the beaten path we have seen being walked a million times before in American movies: fighting with the parents, fighting with the friends, applying to colleges, breaking up with boyfriends and ultimately, finding a sense in it all. The teenage experience it portrays could be called universal. But the most special and precious thing about this film is its balance. The sentimentality gets a splash of realism thrown into it when it borders on being too much and the serious topics feel honest but never too overwhelming. *Lady Bird* is actually very cliché, but it has an amazing poise.

I personally had an opportunity to see it twice and even though I wasn't completely swayed the first time around, the second screening won me over. It was the perks that I found most interesting, for example, the



time setting being in 2002 – strange, that films are being set in these “not so long ago” years already. Even stranger, the distinction from now was so palpable. I liked the depiction of life at a Catholic school, as it reminded me of my own high school and, of course, the mother-daughter relationship that was at the heart of the film.

Another reason that makes *Lady Bird* stand out is its cast. Saoirse Ronan, who is by many considered to be the best actress of her generation (if you don't know about her, look her up!) and has already three Oscar



nominations under her belt at the age of 23, is outstanding in the role of Christine. She works alongside names that became rapidly famous in the last year, such as Timothée Chalamet (from the film *Call Me by Your Name*) or Lucas Hedges (became more known in *Manchester by the Sea* in 2016, but you may also know him from Wes Anderson's picturesque *Moonrise Kingdom*). Such a strong group of actors add to their characters' authenticity and take part in making *Lady Bird* as good as it is.

Lastly, I must mention the director, Greta

Gerwig. *Lady Bird* is both her directing and screenwriting debut, as she used to work as an actress at the indie scene before, where she was mostly known for her role in the film *Frances Ha*. For a debut feature, *Lady Bird* is a work of a surprisingly mature creator and caught the attention of many critics. Maybe that's why it has been critically acclaimed already, winning the Golden Globe for the best picture, best director at TIFF and receiving many nominations at BAFTA and the Oscars, too. Hopefully, if it continues to be successful, we will be able to enjoy it in Slovak theatres soon.



The Unexpected Truth about Spoilers

TEXT: Simona BAJÁKOVÁ

If I tell you this article contains spoilers for a TV show you want to see, will you read it? Most people would probably say no because it's the reasonable thing to say. Spoilers are obviously the worst thing you can come across if you want to enjoy a book, a film, a TV show or any type of media... or at least that's the way it seems.

Now, to be completely honest with you, I have always liked spoilers. I was one of those kids that impatiently skipped through lengthy paragraphs of books to read ahead, and only when I knew what was going to happen, I went back to continue reading, content and ready to enjoy the rest of the ride. When the word *spoiler* started to appear in the vocabularies of many people with a certain dirty connotation to it, I felt like something was off. Well, of course, I don't want to know absolutely everything about a book or a TV show before I read or watch it either, but I certainly need something to look forward to. At the same time, I don't like being tied into knots in dread over "who is going to get killed in this and that episode." All of this has always successfully distracted me from properly enjoying what I was currently watching or reading. I've found seeing some people cover their ears to avoid this kind of information a little funny.

Bearing all of this in mind, to find actual research done on spoilers was kind of a small gift for me. University of San Diego researchers had one group of participants read several famous books after the researchers spoil



their endings. Another group read the books normally. After reading the books, each group rated them on how much they enjoyed them. Based on the results, it turns out you actually like the book more when its ending has been spoiled to you before.

The researchers gave each participant three short stories to read that they were not familiar with, including authors like John Updike, Anton Chekhov, Roald Dahl and Agatha Christie. One of the stories was spoiled with the spoiler paragraph presented before the story, the second one had the spoiler paragraph

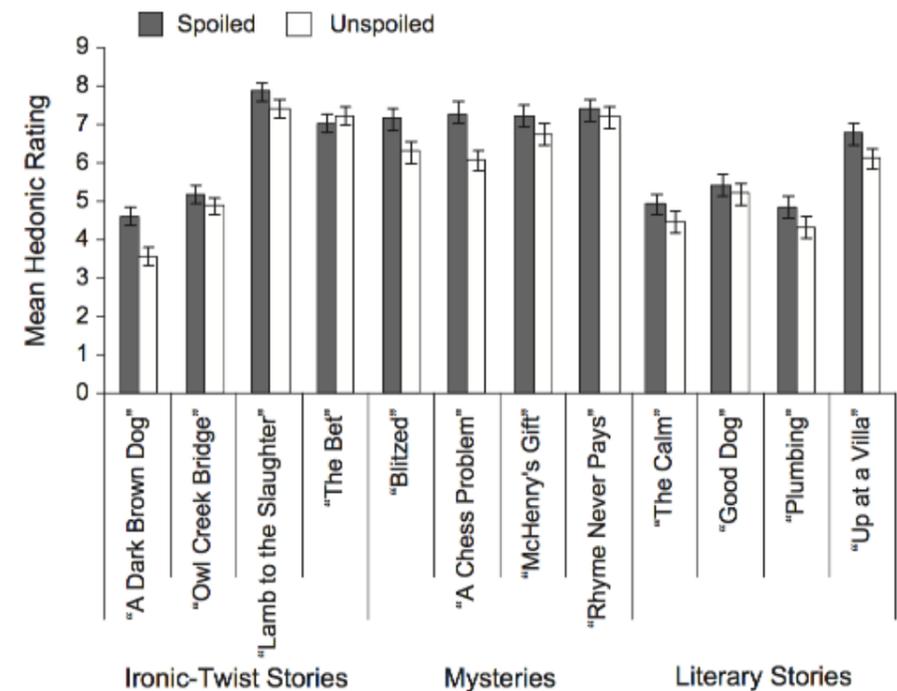


Fig. 1. Hedonic ratings of the individual spoiled and unspoiled stories. Error bars represent standard errors.

incorporated in the opening paragraph to seem like a part of the story and the last one was unspoiled.

As you can see on the graph of the results, the difference is slight but seems significant once you remember the collective despise the pop culture manifests towards the notion of spoiling stories. But the inevitable question remains to be asked: Why is this the result? Why isn't it the other way around?

The researchers claim that pre-acquired information about stories may "allow readers to organize developments, anticipate the implications of events, and resolve ambiguities that occur in the course of reading." When it comes to stories that are more complex, important developments are blurry and can be easily overlooked on the first read, but when revisited, the uncertainty may be replaced by warm anticipation of events once the plot is uncovered. The researchers list this as linked to our perceptual fluency – the ease with information is processed under a certain influence of manipulation to perceptual quality. For example, ads work on the same principle, all that matters to them is that you have seen their product already and you are now more likely to buy it. A similar thing applies to the inner logic of a story. Once you've got hints at something, you can recognise it elsewhere and be an active participant of the story, by figuring it along the way – it's simple as that. This intuitive approach comes naturally to us as beings that seek consequences, rationalisation. At the same time, it

allows us to concentrate more intently on minor, more aesthetic parts of novels, like descriptions, metaphors, wording and many others. Despite being spoiled to us in its wholeness and beauty already, this is the reason why we often re-read books to the point we know them from cover to cover.

Moreover, spoilers can serve as an indicator whether we read or consume content just for the sake of the final revelation alone. The final plot twist, although it plays a key role in any story should always be "predictable" – meaning that you can almost always trace it back and it should never feel too out of place, even though it aims to surprise and sometimes even shock. When spoiled in the right places, a story should remain satisfying.

So next time when you are about to watch a film or a TV show, or read a book, try this experiment on yourself. Give spoilers a chance, maybe they won't be so catastrophic for you after all.

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On the absurd literary criticisms and liberating derision of Myles of the Little Horses/Brian O’Nolan

TEXT: Maxim DULEBA

From 1940 until the author’s death in 1966, one of the three greatest geniuses of modern Irish literature, the disciple of James Joyce and colleague of Samuel Beckett, Brian O’Nolan (1916-1966), wrote a daily column *The Cruiskeen Lawn* for *The Irish Times* newspaper. The columns were published under the pseudonym Myles na gCopaleen, which translates from Irish as Myles of the Little Horses, even though O’Nolan insisted on the translation “Myles of the Ponies”, since he could not find a reason for the principality of the pony to be subjugated to the imperialism of the horse. The column soon after its start became the most humorous, most respected and feared column in the whole of Ireland. Astonishing with its manic imagination, linguistic play, absurdity of the conclusions, the short sketches are justly regarded as true masterpieces of satirical literary journalism.



Although his novels were admired, among the many, by James Joyce, Dylan Thomas or Graham Greene, his status as a concluder of the great trinity of modern Irish writers will be given to him by literary scholars only much later after his death. O’Nolan, who felt widely unappreciated during his lifetime, correctly predicted by the words of his narrator Myles of the Ponies the future of his texts: “It only occurred to me the other day that I will have biographers... All sorts of English persons writing books ‘interpreting’ me.” Luckily, this statement proved to be true, and in the course of the last decade, the academic interest in his work, alongside the need for the re-evaluation of his position in the Anglophone literary canon, has been rising.

His first masterpiece *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), written only when he was twenty-eight years old, achieved immediate success in small liberal literary circles of Dublin; however, due to its overtly experimental nature for which the conservative Ireland was unprepared proved as a commercial failure. Even very enthusiastic admirers and true O’Nolaners will confirm that the book could have been more edited. The hectically composed meta-fiction, the book

about an author who is trying to write a book about an author who is trying to write a book is repeatedly bringing the reader to the state of bewildering and (potentially) exciting confusion. James Joyce tried to promote the novel, claiming that Ireland had found a new and astonishing voice, and that O’Nolan is “a real writer, with the true comic spirit.” Regrettably, Joyce died before his efforts could bring any fruit. O’Nolan’s second masterpiece *The Third Policeman*, written in 1940, was rejected by publishers on both continents and published only posthumously in 1967, one year after his death.

Thus, it was mainly the satirical and humorous column *The Cruiskeen Lawn* which made him famous during his lifetime. Until 1953, O’Nolan had to hide his identity behind the pseudonym due to his job in a civil service, a job he disliked and felt shackled to. It was forbidden for civil servants to publicly express political views. However, in the Dublin circles it was an open secret who the author of the humorous column was.

Hidden behind the narrator Myles as a sympathetic Dublin-raised know-it-all, O’Nolan was a true human machine of creativity, spitting out jokes, anecdotes,

linguistic puns and grotesque pieces of short prose on a daily basis, all of them being dedicated to the “plain people of Ireland.” His writings were usually written in one sitting, often responded to the issues raised in the newspaper and were highly concerned with all possible themes that came under his hand, be it theatre-etiquette, drinking, trains or Irish matters. Of course, the great questions of art and literature were not an exception. Alongside creating Myles, O’Nolan created his own and unique humorous attitude towards life, which proved to be applicable to any possible problem, a strategy of the absolute ridicule and very own easy-flowing derision.

Thus, even if the texts are absurd and not to be taken seriously, they do involve a wisdom worthy of serious consideration, displaying in an existentialist manner life often as absurd and thus not to be taken as a serious matter. In conversations of Myles’s characters, life is being described as “a quare contraption, very dangerous, a certain death-trap.” O’Nolan’s life was marked by alcoholism, depression and many hardships, thus the ironic and humorous tone of his writings might be biographically seen as an output of the defensive creativity of a self-destructive genius.

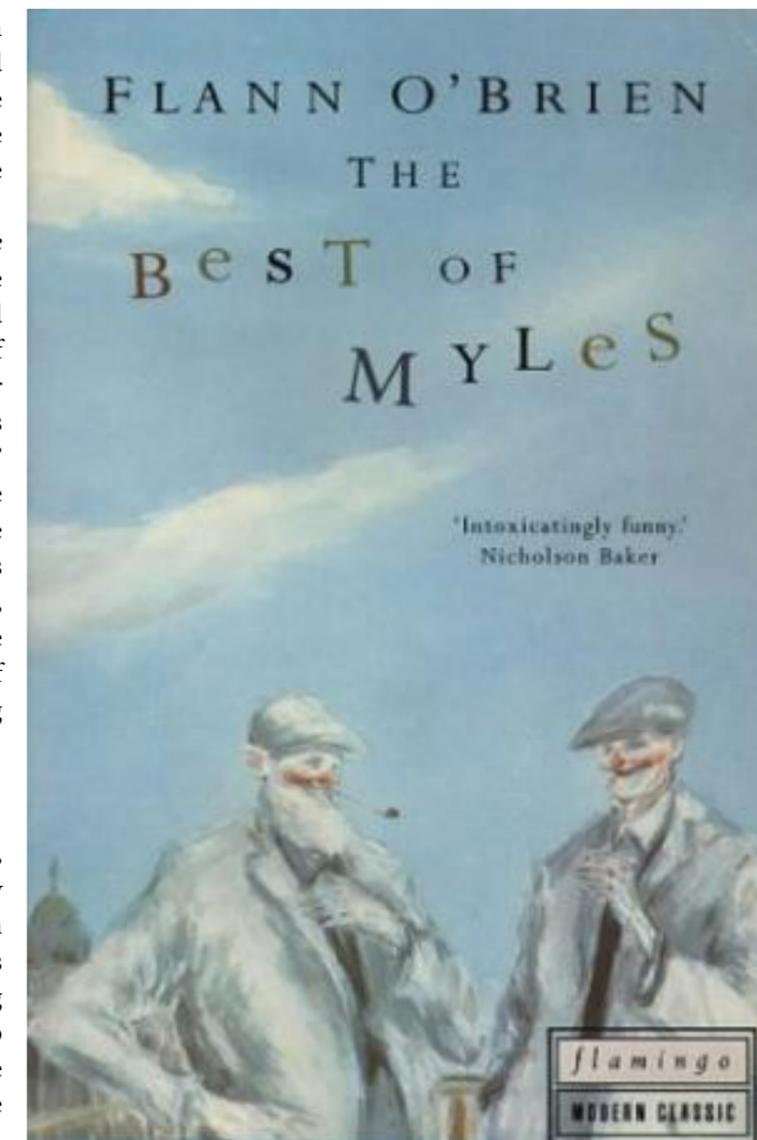
Listener wrote on the collection *The Best of Myles* that it is “likely to endure as long as the philosopher’s stone, and may indeed be the said article. Readers of taste and perception will pack it in their kitbags long before glancing at the likes of Barthes, Foucault and Umberto Eco.” Since we have already put Myles in the line with the other bright geniuses, as he definitely deserves, his literary criticisms might be worth taking into consideration, and who knows, maybe they will come in handy while writing your thesis. Of course, only if you do not insist on getting a very good grade.

On the existence of poetry

According to Myles, in regard to poetry, there is no excuse for its existence. Poetry should be banned. Such a radical claim seems to be inflammatory at first, but Myles as always offers some really machinating arguments for his case: “Poetry gives no adequate return in money, is expensive to print by reason of the waste of space

occasioned by its form and nearly always promulgates illusory concepts of life.” In support of this statement, I doubt that any of you have ever seen a rich owner of a poetry-publishing company, wearing Rolex watches and parking his Ferrari. When it comes to making money, publishers of cookbooks and romantic fiction are definitely doing much better. The same applies to poets in comparison with trash-literature writers. Poets are usually poor, simply because rhyme does not pay.

Another argument Myles provides is also hardly doubtful. Most poetry is bad. As Myles claims, “Nobody is going to manufacture a thousand tons of jam in the expectation that five tons may be eatable.” Try it. Take any ordinary local magazine of contemporary poetry, read it carefully, and you will find the proof for yourself. For most of the time, it is full of overused symbolism and cliché metaphors, and the texts are hardly readable and very monothematic, usually about love or some other form of agony. Go to your



local poetry reading and you will find out that in the better case, your evening will be very ordinary. Some of the poets get nervous and then start to mumble or speak too fast. Some of them try to drown you in unnecessary abstractions in order to demonstrate how clever and interesting they are. Luckily, as it sometimes happens, some of them are talented. But, again, nobody is going to manufacture a thousand tons of jam in the expectation that five tons may be eatable.

Another thing about poetry which Myles sees as very problematic is that it has a tendency to replicate itself, spreading like a sickness: "Furthermore, poetry has the effect on the negligible handful who read it of stimulating them to write poetry themselves. One poem, if widely disseminated, will breed perhaps a thousand inferior copies." Another problem is the overuse of big words used by people discussing poetry: "You will notice above that I used the phrase 'illusory concepts of life.' If you examine it carefully you will find that it is quite meaningless but since when did such a trifle matter?" For Myles, poetry is not meaningful. Well, if poetry does not matter, then what does? For this question, the genius of Myles has got an answer as well: "What is important is food, money, and opportunities for scoring off one's enemies." According to Myles, if you have these things, you should be fine even without poetry.

On aesthetics

"Occasionally I have a word to say about aesthetes. For sensibility, paranoiac reception and all the sublunary paraphernalia of infrapsychic recordings I have not, it is true, concealed my contempt. For appreciation, discrimination and good taste I have nothing to say. These matters do not concern me or any adult." For Myles, the whole field of aesthetics is not a matter worthy of grown-ups. As he argues, even if aesthetes produce judgements, the whole world proceeds to operate without any regard to their statements. "Thus, aesthetics is a mental ailment, the perversion whereby the sufferer believes that to be consistently...passive is the prime bacon, the summum bonham." If you indulge in aesthetic judgements, it is very advisable to seek help from the professional.

On studying literature

According to Myles, education as such is not necessarily bad. Myles acknowledges that it has made him unfit for the drapery trade or "reject the 'physical beauty' of the world as meretricious and seek the community of quiet minds in disputation on the Greek

style of this or that departed heresiarch..." However, he does find a lot of problems in the way that literature is taught at universities. One of them is asking too concrete and strange questions that often start with the word "why". "Why does a poet pray to be made one with the West Wind? For that matter why do I take damn good care not to walk on the cracks in the pavement? Why does my wife fall out of the bed four times every night every July?" There are questions which should not be answered and there are also questions no one wants to know the answer to.

Derision is liberating

Going through the columns of *The Best of Myles* collection is a truly liberating experience. All of the absurd arguments and provokingly funny conclusions blend into one single and exhilarant feeling of exoergic easiness. The feeling comes with the realization that everything might be easily ridiculed and laughed at, even if it comes to such important topics of life and death as art and literature. No other satirist that I have encountered has evoked in me such an intensive feeling of sympathy for his absolute derision of all the surrounding world. But to say that the easy-flowing and natural derision is the key quality of Myles of the Little Horses would not be fair in relation to his many other qualities. Still, it is his ability for absurd thinking which makes his puns and reflections so liberating. When the message conveyed does not need to be seriously engaged, but rather approached from its absurd side, something "truthful" becomes suddenly evident, something "truthful" and omnipresent, the very fact of life which might not be seen if shameless irony and wit are not present.

The great Danish philosopher and the so called "father of existentialism" Søren Kierkegaard saw humor to be of a great philosophical significance. According to Kierkegaard, human beings can move in three existential stages of existence in their lifetimes: the aesthetical, the ethical and the religious. While irony is present at the border between the aesthetical and the ethical, humor is present between the ethical and the religious ways of life. Kierkegaard even believed that Christianity (as he saw it) is the most humorous view of life in world history. Despite being stereotyped as a melancholic and depressive weirdo, his writing is full of many clever wits. Among the philosophers that seriously influenced the history of thinking, I consider him to be the funniest one. For instance, some of the experts consider his publication *The Sickness unto Death* to be also a parody of German idealism,

mainly because it involves way too many unnecessary classifications and definitions. Take a look:

The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the relation but that the relation relates itself to its own self.

Kierkegaard repeatedly mocks thinkers who believe that they really understand what is going on around them, or that take the world too seriously, and especially when it comes to very "serious" philosophers, the ones he liked to label as "pyramid-builders" and make sarcastic and witty comments at their expense. He believed that any argument and "truth" might be undermined when we make fun of it. For him, it is also the humor which liberates us from the illusory world and illusory existence.

Ridicule of scientific seriousness is also very typical of O'Nolan's writing, who invented an insane scientist-philosopher De Selby, who wants to destroy the world and believes that the earth is sausage-shaped. Thus, not only under the narrator of Myles he repeatedly undermines the seriousness of science and philosophical constructions by mockery. Take a look at his description of the "aesthete":

This is life, and stuffed contentedly in the china bath sits the boy it was invented for, morbidly aware of the structure of history, geography, parsing, algebra, chemistry and woodwork: he is up to his chin in the carpediurnal present, and simultaneously, in transcendent sense immediacy, sensible that without him, without his feeling, his observation, his diapassional apprehension on all planes, his non-pensionable function as catalyst, the whole filmy edifice would crumble into dust.

Not only that Myles ridicules a character who takes himself and his knowledge way too seriously in a very Kierkegaardian manner, but his texts also involve wit as liberation from the seriousness the surrounding world tries to impose upon us as a certain form of illusion. Both Kierkegaard and O'Nolan are very deeply religious, yet both of

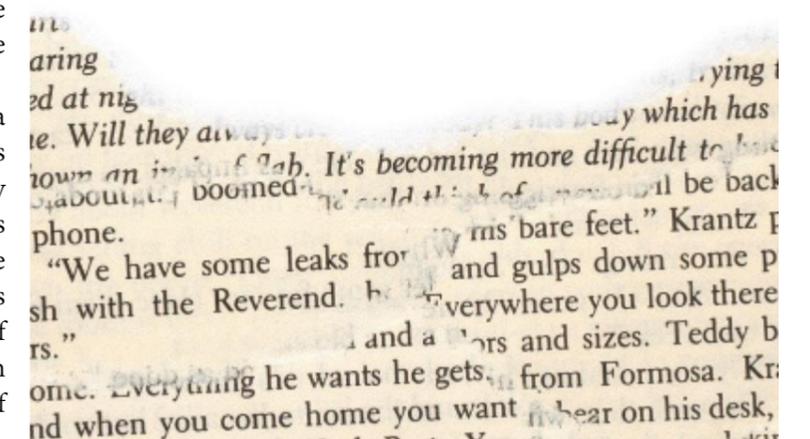
them criticize fanaticism and church dogmas. In their thought, humor, irony and derision help us to develop a resistance towards the indoctrination and towards the unnecessary construction of entrenching abstract pyramids. When we forget ourselves and take our own thinking too seriously, the wisdom of Myles is always a good reminder that everything might be looked upon from the angle of its absurd side, which is always present.

I strongly recommend *The Best of Myles* and *Further Cuttings from Cruiskeen Lawn* to any reader who wants to indulge himself in this liberating process of irony and derision. Even though some of the columns are bound to the time context in which they were written and some require knowledge of important Irish figures and Irish history, their humor and energy are timeless and universal, since Myles's literary journalism is, first and foremost, very good literature, and only in the second place, journalism.

F l a n n O ' B r i e n

FURTHER CUTTINGS
FROM CRUISKEEN LAWN

"The best comic writer I can think of."—S. J. Perelman



Best Horror Stories

TEXT: Viktor FÜRSTEN

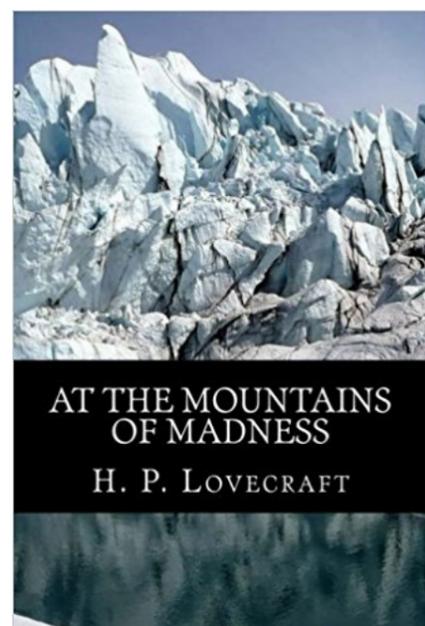
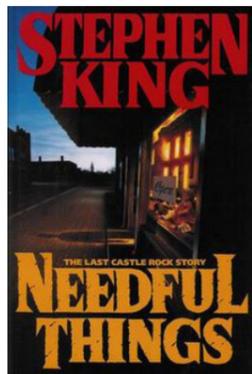
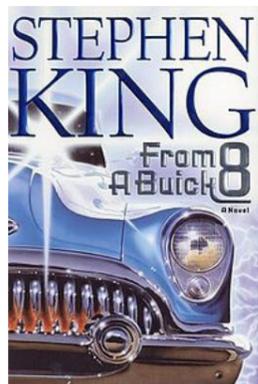
With the recent popularity boom of horror movies and adapting horror fiction into successful Netflix shows and other cinematic pleasures, I'd like to give you my 5 tips for good horror books. I was trying to focus on a different kind of experience, and even though some of these authors are popular, I wanted to focus more on their non-mainstream books that all have a unique reading experience to them.

Stephen King

His famous name rings a bell even to those that don't read much horror fiction. He is mostly known for books such as *The Shining*, *Carrie*, *Green Mile*, or *It*, which is popular again after its movie adaptation gained so much success last year. Stephen King has produced many interesting and worthwhile books.

From a Buick 8 is one of my personal favorites. It tells the story of a young teenage boy whose father, a policeman, died during a routine driver's license check. The boy is now working with his father's colleagues at the local police station during one summer and discovers an old veteran car, Buick 8. After work, all of the people working at the police station gather and tell stories about this car.

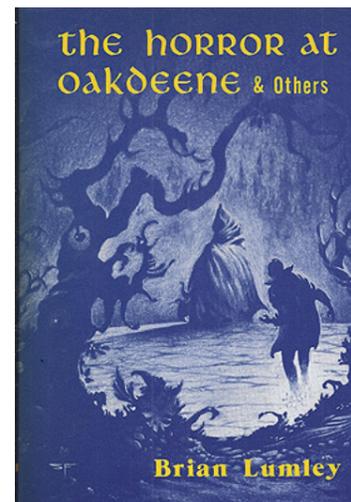
Another story set in King's own town of terror, Castle Rock, is *Needful Things*. It's a story about a new shop where everyone will definitely find that one thing they always wanted and for a fair price as well. However, the shopkeeper demands a favor from each one of his customers. This one is an absolute blast when it comes to the climax of the novel. With each chapter further into the book, you are closer and closer to anarchy.



H. P. Lovecraft

He is the uncrowned king of horror. He was not very popular during his time but influenced many. His texts are suffused with cults, dreams, and madness and written in the sophisticated language of a gentleman of the 1920s. H.P. Lovecraft was heavily influenced by Edgar Allan Poe, and you can see it in many of his stories, but Lovecraft let his imagination run wilder and into unknown places, dimensions and worlds that Poe had never wandered off to. Most of his work consists of short stories, including "Pickman's Model", "The Call of Cthulhu", "The Color out of Space", and "The Statement of Randolph Carter".

At the Mountains of Madness is a story about a scientific expedition to Antarctica, where they find something that predates even the oldest human civilization. This beautifully crafted piece of fiction, Lovecraft's longest, includes such precise details that lead you to believe that what you're reading is truly a log of an expedition from the 1930s.



Brian Lumley

He is an excellent author who follows in the footsteps of H. P. Lovecraft. His stories have the suspense, atmosphere, and themes of Lovecraft's stories. They are set in the same universe as Lovecraft's; however, Lumley's heroes "actually fight back" as he himself said. Overall, Lumley feels like a much fresher and better-paced English Lovecraft.

His story "Born of the Winds" is a chilling tale set in arctic Canada, which follows a young meteorologist on a sick leave, helping an elderly lady find her lost son, a leader of a strange cult.

"The Horror at Oakdeene" is the story of a student employed as a guard in a mental asylum Oakdeene, where he encounters some strange individuals and begins to take an interest in their doings.

Clive Barker

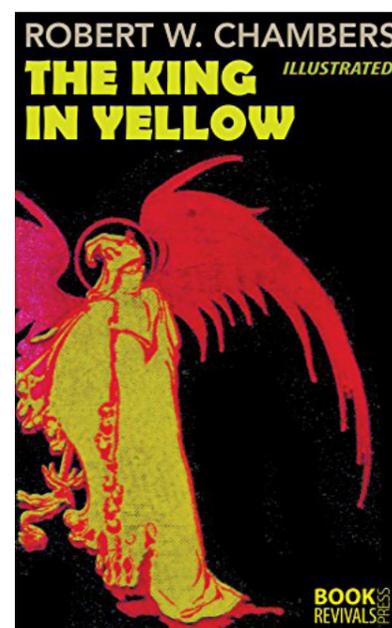
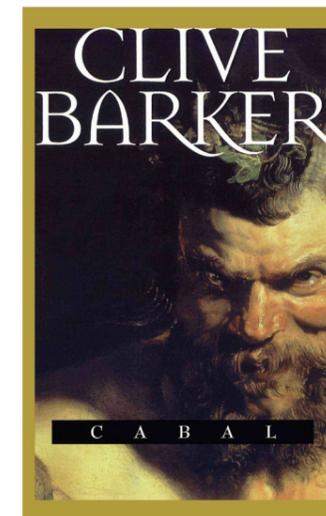
He has been called "the future of horror" by no one other than Stephen King himself, but beware, it's going to get rough. Unlike the other authors on this list, Barker does not shy away from gore, violence, torture, and his books are suffused with blood and raw pain. However, they still have quite unique stories.

An example may be Barker's most successful and famous work to date, the short novel *The Hellbound Heart*, which was later adapted to the movie screen as *Hellraiser* under the direction of Barker himself. It delves into the hellish torment of the protagonist's own vanity turned on himself. It's definitely worth a read as it's shorter than *Cabal*.

It's also important to include the short story "The Forbidden", which has been the source material for another bloody horror movie *The Candyman*, for its immensely poetic and beautiful ending.

Cabal is the tale of Boone, a young man who is convinced by his psychiatrist that he has murdered eleven people although he has no recollection of doing so.

To escape law enforcers, he sets on a journey to find the mysterious city of Midian, the home of monsters.



Robert W. Chambers

He wrote horror or weird fiction only in his early writing career and later turned to hugely popular romantic literature. However, the few stories he wrote in the genre of horror have remained immensely influential to this day. Lovecraft himself included him in his essay on horror fiction and stated on more than one occasion that Chambers was a great influence on him. Other authors that were inspired by Chambers include Grant Morrisson, a comic book writer, Neil Gaiman, the author of *Coraline*, *American Gods*, *The Sandman*, or even George R. R. Martin, the author of *The Game of Thrones*.

The King in Yellow is a collection of stories that has been dubbed as the classic of supernatural horror. The first half of the stories are tied together by the motif of a forbidden play called *The King in Yellow*, which induces madness in those who read or watch it. An eerie entity, *The King*, is present in the shadows of all those stories. This book was also the source of inspiration for the hit TV show *True Detective*, which we can refer to as a loose adaptation of *The King in Yellow*.

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