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Modern Czech Classics

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Distribution in the Slovak Republic

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Karolinum Press

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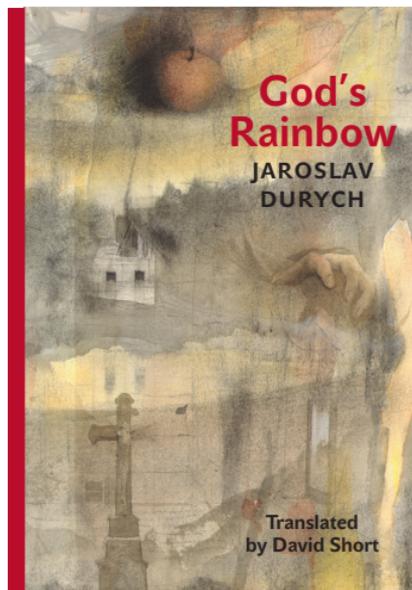
Central European modern history is notable for many political and cultural discontinuities and often violent changes as well as many attempts to preserve and (re)invent traditional cultural identities. This series cultivates contemporary translations of influential literary works into English (and other languages) which have not been available to global readership due to censorship, the effects of Cold War or repetitive political disruptions in Czech publishing and its international ties.

Readers in English both in today's cosmopolitan Prague or anywhere in the physical and electronic world can thus become acquainted with works which capture the Central European historical experience and which express and also have helped to form Czech and Central European nature, humour and imagination.

Believing that any literary canon can be defined only in dialogue with other cultures, the series will bring proven classics used in Western university courses as well as (re)discoveries aiming to provide new perspectives in intermedial areal studies of literature, history and culture.

All titles are accompanied by an afterword, the translations are reviewed and circulated in the scholarly community before publication which has been reflected by nominations for several literary awards.

Modern Czech Classics series edited by Martin Janeček
and Karolinum Press.



God's Rainbow

Jaroslav Durych

Translated by David Short

Afterword

by Rajendra A. Chitnis

- 2016 ■ CA. 260 P. ■ ISBN 978-80-246-3291-9 ■
- HARDCOVER ■ CZK 400 ■ \$ 22 ■ £ 15.50
- ILLUSTRATED IN COLOR THROUGHOUT ■
- E-BOOK (E-PUB) ■ ISBN 978-80-246-3322-0
- CZK 280 ■ \$ 17 ■ £ 12

Although Jaroslav Durych completed his novella *God's Rainbow* in 1955, it was not published until 1969, long after his death. This was due to several factors; not only was Durych considered a controversial author, but the theme was problematic for the Communist Party censorship as well. The dream-like story about guilt and reconciliation takes place in the Sudeten border region after the displacement of its German inhabitants shortly after World War II. An elderly, lonely man arrives in a depopulated and devastated village in search for the informer whose act left a mark on the man's life. Instead he meets a young German girl who has secretly returned to her house after having experienced and miraculously survived all the horrors of the end of the war in the German borderlands. Although on the verge of exhaustion, both protagonists have to come to terms with the past, a painful experience, before they find the courage to make a fresh start.

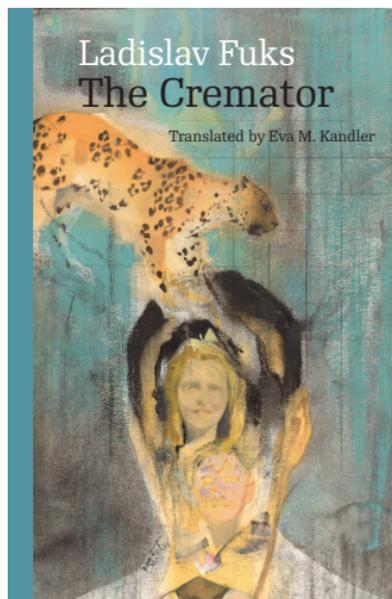
Jaroslav Durych (1886–1962), originally a military physician, was a Czech poet, playwright, journalist, and the most distinctive representative of Catholic literature. His literary works primarily focus on the historical period after the Battle of White Mountain (1620), the “Catholic baroque.”

“Romance spins a bright thread through the pattern of the grimness of religious fanaticism, petty intrigues of prelates and princes, jealousy of generals, and horrors of the times... Highly dramatic, keyed to the interests of those intelligent readers who like meaty historical fiction.”

— Kirkus Reviews

“I would have spat on the shadow, but something held me back and I lapsed into reverie. That stupid cone led me to the viper. And why? The hideous viper, I’m sure, knew many things. Who knows if its scales had not mirrored her who had looked down, clinging to the golden gate of God’s rainbow, down into my boyhood dreams! And now the viper had disappeared for good and hadn’t even given me a hiss —. My wretched shadow propped itself on my stick and began to titter: And where are you actually going? What vice is pushing you there and what’s the allure of the place? (...) You’d be better off going back (pp. 29-30).”





The Cremator

Ladislav Fuks

Translated by Eva M. Kandler

Afterword

by Rajendra A. Chitnis

2016 ■ CA. 200 P. ■ ISBN 978-80-246-3290-2 ■
PAPERBACK ■ CZK 300 ■ \$ 18 ■ £ 12.50
■ E-BOOK (E-PUB) ■ ISBN 978-80-246-3334-3
■ CZK 210 ■ \$ 15 ■ £ 10.50

Although the novella *The Cremator* was written in 1967, the plot is set three decades earlier. Ladislav Fuks wrote a book permeated with anxiety, fear, lawlessness and loneliness set against the background of the onset of Nazi ideology and in the context of war and the fate of the Jewish people. This grotesque novella presents a psychological drama about a man who, while absolutely convinced that he is doing good, instead destroys the people dearest to him. This parable about the jeopardization of human values is embodied in a man, a family man, who succumbs to a higher power, and in an effort to liberate his dearest, he gradually destroys his own family, and begins to believe in racial superiority. The image of evil gradually loses its firm contours, no longer a ubiquitous threat, as it gradually takes on the form of a single person obsessed with a transpersonal idea.

Comparable to Klaus Mann's *Mefisto* (1936), *The Cremator* is a novel about the great ascent of a man chasing after a single life goal.

Ladislav Fuks (1923–1994) was an outstanding Czech writer whose work, consisting primarily of psychological fiction, explores themes of

anxiety and life in totalitarian systems. Fuks is best known for his works of short fiction set during the Holocaust, specifically *The Cremator*, which was later (1968) made into an acclaimed film.

“Disorientating, disquieting and darkly humorous, *The Cremator* remains one of the most richly resonant celluloid nightmares.”

— **Virginie Sélavy**

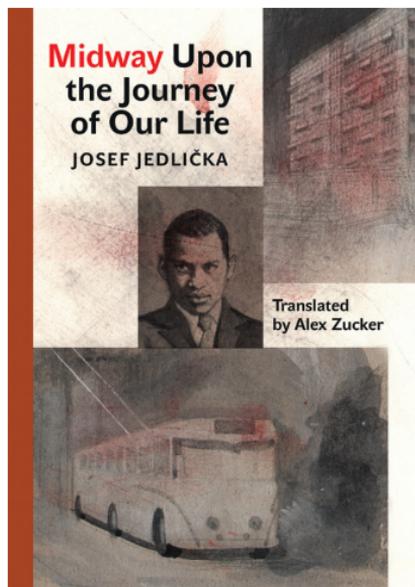
The Devil's neatest trick is to persuade us that he does not exist.

(Giovanni Papini)

“Do you know how long it takes before man turns to dust in the ground? Twenty years, but even then the skeleton does not disintegrate completely. In the crematorium it takes a mere seventy-five minutes even with the skeleton, now that they have installed gas instead of coke. People sometimes object that Jesus Christ was not cremated but buried in the ground. Well, Mr. Strauss,” said Mr. Kopfrkingl with a smile, “that was something else. (...) Dead, he no longer feels it...”

(...)

“My lovely! A letter came for me. I’ve been appointed head of an enormous undertaking. I’m leaving the crematorium for a higher post. It concerns a Reich project which will prevent the exploitation of mankind once and for all, it’s suffering from hunger and poverty. It’ll rid people of all kinds of suffering, and perhaps even horses... Unfortunately, I can’t give you any details. It’s secret. Complete reticence is necessary. But what if I showed you the place where I’ve been working for the last twenty years before I leave the crematorium? What would you say to that? To see where your father began, worked, faithfully performed his duties, grew and matured? Tomorrow is Saturday, there’s no cremation in the afternoon, not until Monday... How about putting on that pretty black silk dress which I bought for you the other day, and going to have a look...? I’ll get,” he said, “a camera somewhere...”



Midway Upon the Journey of Our Life

Josef Jedlička

Translated by Alex Zucker
Afterword
by Rajendra A. Chitnis

2016 ■ 192 P. ■ ISBN 978-80-246-3127-1 ■
HARDCOVER ■ CZK 430 ■ \$ 25 ■ £ 17.50
■ ILLUSTRATED IN COLOR THROUGHOUT ■
E-BOOK (E-PUB) ■ ISBN 978-80-246-3128-8
■ CZK 300 ■ \$ 22 ■ £ 15.50

Josef Jedlička's *Midway Upon the Journey of Our Life*, written in the years 1954–57, was a slap in the face to the reigning aesthetic of socialist realism in Communist Czechoslovakia. In this antiheroic novella, heavily influenced by Russian writer and theorist Viktor Shklovsky, meditative and speculative reflections intertwine with darkly comic scenes from the everyday life of the author and his neighbors, dwelling in the Le Corbusier-style Collective House in Litvínov, north Bohemia. The chronology of the narrative ranges from May 1945 to the early 1950s, as Jedlička and his compatriots go about the business of “building a new society” and the mythology that undergirds it. Due to its critical stance toward communism, the novella could not be published in Czech until 1966, amid the easing of cultural control leading up to Prague Spring, and even then it was still censored. A complete version did not appear until 1994, five years after the Velvet Revolution.

Josef Jedlička (1927–1990) was a Czech essayist and novelist. Expelled from Charles University in Prague after leaving the Communist Party, he moved to the border town of Litvínov. In 1968, after the Soviet invasion and occupation, he and his family emigrated to West Germany, where he

worked as a cultural editor for Radio Free Europe and also wrote many articles, studies, and reviews for Czech emigré journals.

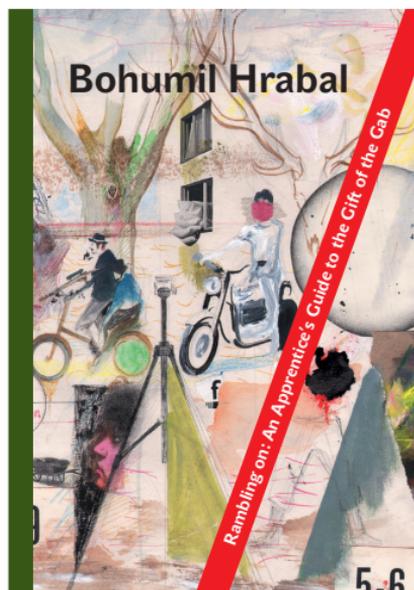
“I know of no other book in Czech literature after 1948 that has depicted with such concentration, such intensity and aggressive melancholy, and at the same time so authentically, the tragic timelessness of those people who, lacking a future, were to be integrated into the vision of an uncertain world, yet who consciously—and for good reason—resisted.”

— Peter Urban

“We can begin and end anywhere, for we have not made a pact with victory, but with struggle. In the old days they began with childhood – yet how many mass graves have they filled in since then! What a terrible burden of vigilant loyalty has accrued to us over the years, what an effort we make to bear its weight, so we may still be capable of hope and love today, and, perhaps, again tomorrow!

But I am writing a book: *Somewhere in the middle of life comes a moment when a man must take his fate into his own hands.* For it comes to pass that the young woman we hope for from birth and remember to our final hour marries and gives birth to a child. You kissed her just once, in the rain (...). And it comes to pass that they kill a poet before your eyes and a weary policeman, a gentle soul, brings home a sheet of paper from an unfinished piece of writing, folded into a fortune teller for his children. And then it comes to pass one day that tender young seamstresses, their doll-like busts working in graceful rhythm, put in overtime to mend the red banner of the revolution using the finest thread. And that is that moment. It usually comes before sunup, and from that point on, lyricism is done for” (pp. 7-9).





Rambling On

An Apprentice's Guide
to the Gift of the Gab

Bohumil Hrabal

Translated by David Short
Afterword by Václav Kadlec

2014 ■ 352 P. ■ ISBN 978-80-246-2316-0 ■
HARDCOVER ■ CZK 390 ■ \$ 20 ■ £ 14
■ ILLUSTRATED IN COLOR THROUGHOUT ■
E-BOOK (E-PUB) ■ ISBN 978-80-246-2897-4
■ CZK 270 ■ \$ 14 ■ £ 10

Rambling On is a collection of stories set in Hrabal's Kersko. Several of the stories were written before the 1968 Soviet invasion of Prague but had to be reworked when they were rejected by Communist censorship during the 1970s. This edition features the original, uncensored versions of those stories—we have sought to preserve the author's original intention. Hrabal's narrative technique and deeply elaborate imagination is unique. His short stories seem to be like fragments of everyday life and have a deep core of general humanity and as such they call for no further comment and can be read for the sheer pleasure of it. These tales are humorous and surreal.

Bohumil Hrabal (1914–1997) was one of the most important Czech writers of the 20th century, and was even more central to Prague than the others. His extensive work is characterized by his original style and a deep interest in tragicomic figures from the fringes of society. His books include *Closely Watched Trains*, which was adapted into a film that won the Academy Award for Best Foreign-Language Film in 1967, the novel *I Served the King of England* and *Too Loud Solitude*.

“One single book by Hrabal does more for people, for their freedom of mind, than all the rest of us with our actions, our gestures, our noisy protests.”

— Milan Kundera

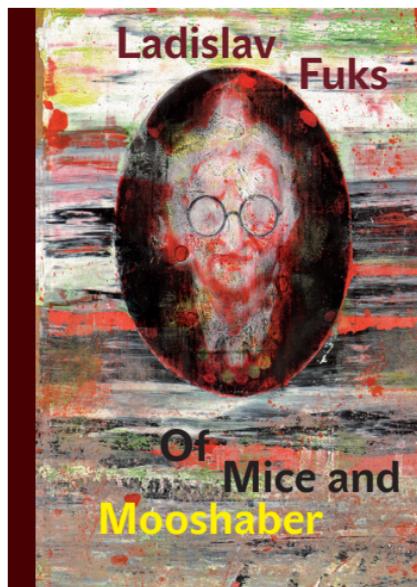
“Like Orwell, Hrabal is attuned to how power renders us ridiculous, but his critique is slant, sometimes obscured.”

**— Parul Sehgal,
The New York Times**



THE SNOWDROP FESTIVAL

“Kersko forest is so deep that, as the legendary Czech wrestler Gustav Frištenský tells us, a black member of his professional Graeco-Roman group got lost in it and Frištenský never saw him again, as he says in his Memoirs. I was looking for Mr Liman, and I was so long looking for him that I nearly got lost in the forest, because I was facing a tumbledown cottage, a number of byres and an outhouse, in front of which, on a chair, sat an old man in dungarees, his white hair sticking out like horns, such strange strands his hair was in, like long coils of steel swarf, like wood shavings all intertwined and interlocking. He sat there and chickens were pecking all round him and he was scattering grain for them. I said: “Nice spot this, isn’t it?” (...) I said how pleased I was that, if nothing else, the air here was wonderful. “True,” he said, “the air hereabouts is raw, but wholesome, and then Kersko, a forest-city, is divided up and numbered on the model of New York, the metalled concrete road is like Fifth Avenue, and the avenues off to the side, they’re like streets, if you leave the main thoroughfare, then on the right-hand side they’re even-numbered, and on the left odd, so if you were to look down on this forest-city from above, the layout’s like a fern frond,” he said and stood up, and his hair stuck out awesomely, and it struck me that the tips of the curls could poke an eye out if they were made of bronze” (pp. 135-136).



Of Mice and Mooshaber

Ladislav Fuks

Translated by Mark Corner

Afterword

by Rajendra A. Chitnis

2014 ■ 512 P. ■ ISBN 978-80-246-2216-3 ■

HARDCOVER ■ CZK 490 ■ \$ 20 ■ £ 14

■ ILLUSTRATED IN COLOR THROUGHOUT ■

E-BOOK (E-PUB) ■ ISBN 978-80-246-2899-8

■ CZK 310 ■ \$ 16 ■ £ 11

Written before the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 but not published until 1970, *Of Mice and Mooshaber* is Fuks's first novel, utopian-allegorical novel that shows the destructive evil influence on humans. The story takes place in an unspecified country in which the ruler has been overthrown and replaced by a dictator. The protagonist, Mrs. Mooshaber, is an old widow whose husband was a coachman in a brewery. Her life revolves around her job as a caretaker for troublesome children, her own ungrateful children, and her fear of mice, which she tries to catch in traps. Blending elements of the grotesque with the fantastic, Fuks's novel of heartbreaking tragedy speaks to the evil that can be found within the human soul.

Ladislav Fuks (1923–1994) was an outstanding Czech writer whose work, consisting primarily of psychological fiction, explores themes of anxiety and life in totalitarian systems. Fuks is best known for his works of short fiction set during the Holocaust, specifically *The Cremator* and *Mr. Theodore Mundstock*.

“This excellent depiction of a totalitarian society, whose prophetic, almost clairvoyant vision of the year 1989 holds a distorted mirror up to its time and society, while also representing a fascinating exploration of the depths of the human soul.”

— Theatre Husa na provázku

“Mrs Mooshaber, since you live with a window onto the courtyard and a front door leading into the passage, that must mean you have mice...”

“Oh yes,” said Mrs Mooshaber, leaning on the sideboard, “I’m the one to know about that. The caretaker says that the rat-catcher should be sent for. She says even a cat won’t do the trick. I don’t think there’s anyone like that in the whole city.”

“I think not,” chimed in the other policeman, “Mrs Mooshaber is correct. So you haven’t got a cat?” he inquired.

“I haven’t,” Mrs Mooshaber replied, “but someone in the house has. I put down traps. Right here...” Mrs Mooshaber opened a drawer in the sideboard and took out three empty traps. “I have some right here. The rest are set under the sideboard and the sofa. And over there behind the stove. Also in my other room and in the corridor. I keep some streaky bacon on a plate in the larder and sprinkle it with poison. It’s a white powder. *Moroccan*. I keep that in the larder too.”



inspired by his own experience in a war. The novel has been translated into about sixty languages, making it the most translated novel in Czech literature.

“I think that Hašek is still very relevant, and the sense of being a traveler in a disordered universe does bear some parallels with the modern day. Coping with a globalized world, there are similar ways in which one can feel discomforted by the loss of clear forms of identification that used to exist.”

— David Vaughan, www.radio.cz

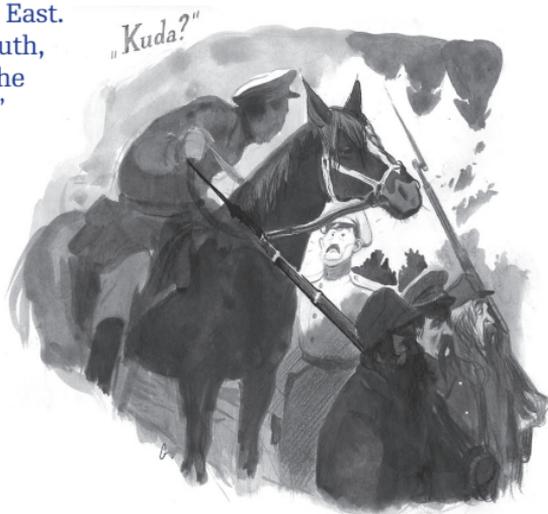
“We asked the captain about our whereabouts. After a long time spent searching and measuring, he announced that we were near the Danish coast or the Swedish cost, unless we were near one of the islands belonging to one of the other of these two kingdoms.

The precise identification of where we were proved to be a source of general excitement. Some woman dissolved in tears at the fact that she would not see Germany again on account of our not heading towards Stettin but to the opposite shoreline. (...)

The engineer on his straw mattress below deck wondered out loud: With the invention of the compass ships are able to determine which direction is South, North, West and East.

The South Pole lies to the South, whilst the North Pole, on the other hand, lies to the North.’

The woman who had been in tears when we were either alongside Denmark or Sweden’ now had a fit of hysteria and yelled that in no way was she going to the North Pole, a place that filled her with dread” (pp. 183-185).

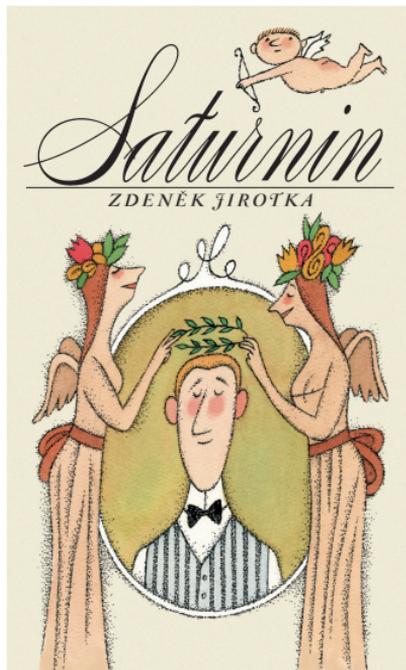


Saturnin

Zdeněk Jirotka

Translated by Mark Corner

Saturnin also available in our editions in German, Russian, Spanish, Italian, and French



2013 ■ 264 P. ■ ISBN 978-80-246-0683-5 ■
HARDCOVER ■ CZK 440 ■ \$ 30 ■ £ 21
■ ILLUSTRATED IN COLOR THROUGHOUT

On its initial publication in Czech in 1942, *Saturnin* was a best-seller, its gentle satire offering an unexpected—if temporary—reprieve from the grim reality of the German occupation. In the years since, the novel has been hailed as a classic of Czech literature, and this translation makes it available to English-language readers for the first time—which is entirely appropriate, for author Zdeněk Jirotka clearly modeled his light comedy on the English masters Jerome K. Jerome and P. G. Wodehouse. The novel's main character, Saturnin, a “gentleman's gentleman” who obviously owes a debt to Wodehouse's beloved Jeeves, wages a constant battle to protect his master from romantic disaster and intrusive relatives, such as Aunt Catherine, the “Prancing Dictionary of Slavic Proverbs.” *Saturnin* will warm the heart of any fan of literary comedy. The novel is enlivened with new, full-color illustrations by Czech graphic artist Adolph Born.

Zdeněk Jirotka (1911–2003) was a Czech writer of radio-broadcast plays and author of humorous novels, short stories, and feuilletons. After the Nazi occupation he worked for the Public Works Ministry and in

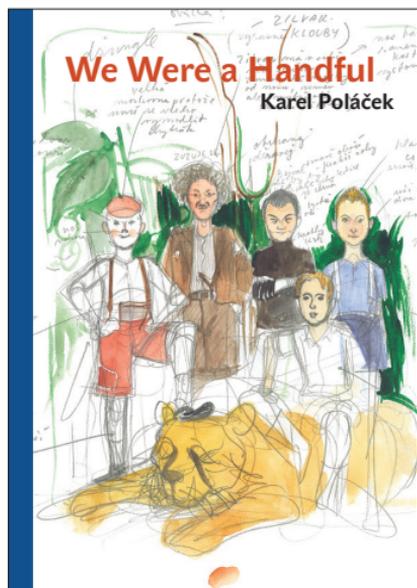
1942, when his most famous novel *Saturnin* earned him a great success, he became a full-time writer.

“A delicious dry humour and an imaginative flair that makes it much more than just the ‘Czech Jeeves.’ Owing more to Jerome K. Jerome than to P. G. Wodehouse, the writing is rich in homespun wisdom and casual asides that take on a life of their own, leading the reader up charming byways of irrelevance... A surprising number of belly-laughs for a novel that is more than half a century old.”

— Adam Preston, *Times Literary Supplement*

“I played three sets with her and lost all of them. This was not a pleasant experience, but I consoled myself with the thought that she would think I was playing the gallant. Strangely enough, however, she did not think this, and informed me after the game that she had never seen such a ridiculous forehand drive as mine. She spoke even more disapprovingly on the subject of my service. She said that I served like an old woman. I do not like it when a young lady expresses herself in such a manner. Naturally you must not be allowed to think that I am a defender of euphemistic social conventions and white lies I would not have found it preferable if, after a match in which my level of play was almost an embarrassment, I had heard Miss Barbara coming out with sentences as: ‘Oh you play so beautifully! It is so long since I’ve enjoyed a game like that. You must adore playing tennis.’ I would definitely not like to hear that, but at the same time it is not necessary to use suburban slang such as “You serve like an old woman” (p. 25).





We Were a Handful

Karel Poláček

Translated by Mark Corner

- 2007 ■ 400 P. ■ ISBN 978-80-246-1449-6 ■
- HARDCOVER ■ CZK 490 ■ \$ 30 ■ £ 21
- ILLUSTRATED IN COLOR THROUGHOUT ■
- E-BOOK (E-PUB) ■ ISBN 978-80-246-2901-8
- CZK 310 ■ \$ 16 ■ £ 11

A famous Czech humoristic novel depicting adventures of five boys from a small Czech town in the form of a child's diary written by Petr Bajza, a grocer's son. In the middle of the Second World War, the most difficult period in his life—before his transport to the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1944. Czech writer Karel Poláček recalls his happy childhood through the eyes of the child narrator. The reader discovers the world seen through the eyes of children experiences his daily adventures and clashes with the incomprehensible world of the grown-ups as well as fights with children's gangs from the neighborhood and can appreciate the charming language of boys, frequently the main source of humor. After more than 60 years, also English-speakers are offered a chance to read this Poláček's novel.

Karel Poláček (1892-1945), along with Karel Čapek and Jaroslav Hašek, was one of the most important Czech novelists and journalists of the inter-war period, and a great interpreter of everyday life and a great anti-war writer, Poláček—who was of Jewish descent—died in the Gleiwitz concentration camp.

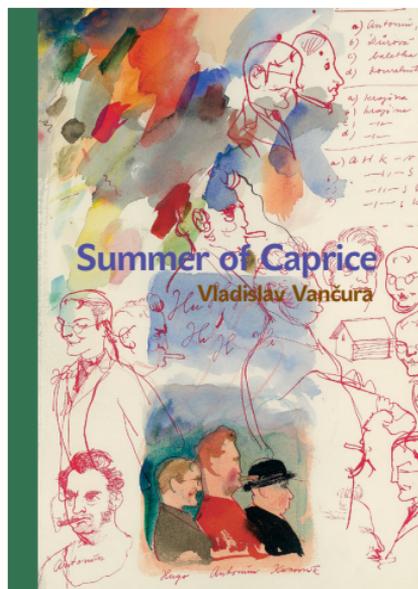
„Here is an extract that conveys something of how humour can deal with tragedy, and how sometimes you might think it is almost slightly mocking, but then you see that really it is not. There is actually a lot of humanity in it.”

**— David Vaughan,
www.radio.cz**



“So I’m glad to be a boy, because only a man knows how to bring his enemies down so that they’re begging for mercy and promising that they’ll never do anything wrong again. Girls fight too, but it doesn’t mean anything, all they do is giggle and cry. They don’t know how to play, their games are so stupid and they want to get married. But no one will have them because it’s no fun with them. When they play at weddings, a girl has to be the bridegroom because no boy will do it, so she does a wiggle and twists her mouth and that’s how we’re supposed to tell she’s the groom.

You ought to know that I was once in great danger of staying a girl, because every boy when he’s born starts off as a lassie and only later becomes a lad. I wore girl’s dresses until I was four because our family wanted them used up” (pp. 20–22).



Summer of Caprice

Vladislav Vančura

Translated by Mark Corner

Summer of Caprice also available in our editions in Italian as *Un'estate capricciosa*; and French as *Un été capricieux*

- 2006 ■ 204 P. ■ ISBN 80-246-1195-3 ■
- HARDCOVER ■ CZK 480 ■ \$ 30 ■ £ 21
- ILLUSTRATED IN COLOR THROUGHOUT ■
- E-BOOK (E-PUB) ■ ISBN 978-80-246-2908-7
- CZK 335 ■ \$ 17 ■ £ 12

Summer of Caprice, first published in 1926, is a classic of Czech writing, yet it is little known elsewhere. This may be due to the complexities of the text, which is characterized by a playful narrative, an exceptional mastery of language, and a layered metatextual context that has only become richer over the decades. The calm, sleepy atmosphere of a summer lido is disturbed by the arrival of a magician and his girlfriend Anna. The lives of the people living in a small town take unexpected turns and the events of the three days in June suddenly turn the main protagonists' lives upside down. Translator has rendered this exceptional work in an English translation that beautifully captures Vančura's experimental style—or, as the author himself called it—"poetism in prose." However, it is an experiment aiming to present an understanding of Czech spirit, humor and way of life.

Vladislav Vančura (1891-1945), one of the greatest Czech writers, initially engaged in the Avant-Garde movement, later an author of epic fiction. He was also an important dramatist, essayist, film director, script-writer and public figure. He was executed by the Nazis as a member of the resistance.

“This is one of Vladislav Vančura’s works in which the witty conversation and ingenious dialogues surpass the plot itself.”
— Epoch Times

“Certainly, Vladislav Vančura’s language is a test for any translator’s mettle.”
— Alice Horáčková, MF Dnes

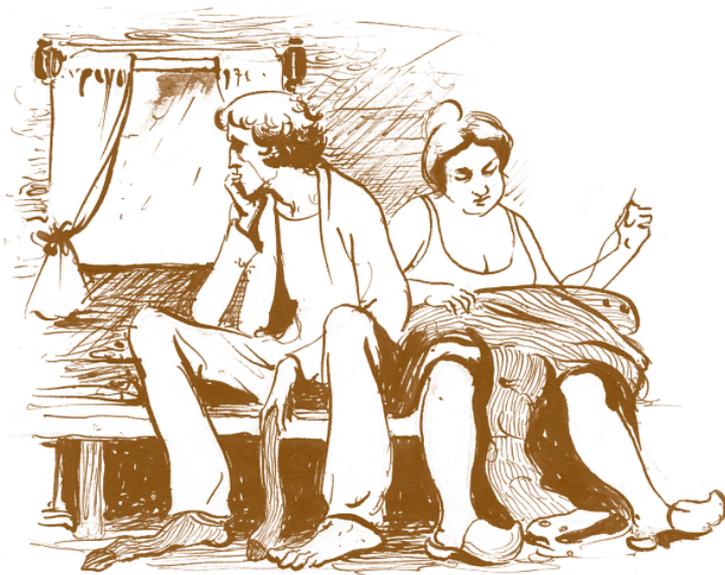
“I have said it before,” master Hussey began, “and I will say it again a thousand times. Anna is not suited to a place like this. Look at the awkward way in which she conducts herself. Look at the way she scours those bowls for money that isn’t there.”

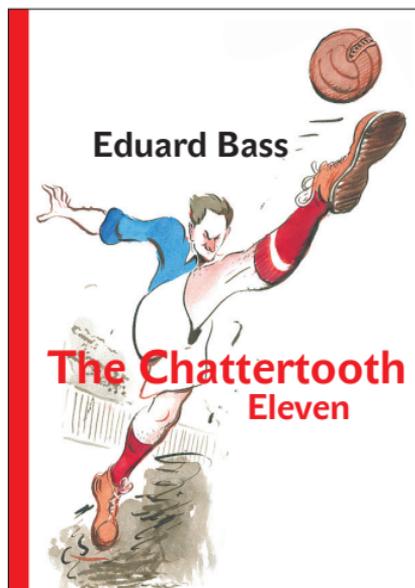
“I think that you should marry her, Major, because the likelihood is that she has received nothing but torment from Mrs Hussey.”

“Miss,” he went on to say, as Anna came towards him, “tie your things up in a bundle and leave the wagon to fend for itself. Come and join us! Take over my spa facilities and the books of the canon.”

“But what will we do with the major?” asked the girl.

“I will dispatch the magician and go to prison,” offered Hugo
(pp. 156-157).





The Chattertooth Eleven

Eduard Bass

Translated by Ruby Hobling

Foreword by Mark Corner

2009 ■ 224 P. ■ ISBN 978-80-246-1573-8 ■
HARDCOVER ■ CZK 390 ■ \$ 25 ■ £ 17.50
■ ILLUSTRATED IN COLOR THROUGHOUT ■
E-BOOK (E-PUB) ■ ISBN 978-80-246-2912-4
■ CZK 270 ■ \$ 14 ■ £ 10

In 1922, the same year that saw the establishment of the Czechoslovak Football Association, a former singer and cabaret director from Prague published a novel about soccer. Eighty-six years later, that novel, Eduard Bass's *The Chattertooth Eleven*, has been reprinted more than thirty times, been made into a film, and is one of the most popular works of Czech fiction in history. Sports matches in the First Republic became social events as a visit of a theatre.

This book tells the extraordinary adventures of an ordinary father, Chattertooth, and his eleven sons—whom he has raised as an unbeatable soccer team. This humorous tale—set in the aftermath of World War I—celebrates fair play and perseverance while simultaneously taking a gently ironic stance towards the Czech infatuation with soccer.

Eduard Bass (1888–1946) was a Czech prose writer and journalist. He was an editor for the Czech daily the *Lidové noviny* and from 1933 its editor-in-chief. Among his works, the best known today is the humorous novel *The Chattertooth Eleven* and the novel *Cirkus Humberto*.

“What could be more appropriate than the story of Klapzuba (Chattertooth) and his eleven sons, sub-titled ‘a tale of a Czech football team for boys young and old’? Indeed the book has always been a great favorite among young and older readers alike—which in modern parlance would mean it has that crossover potential.”

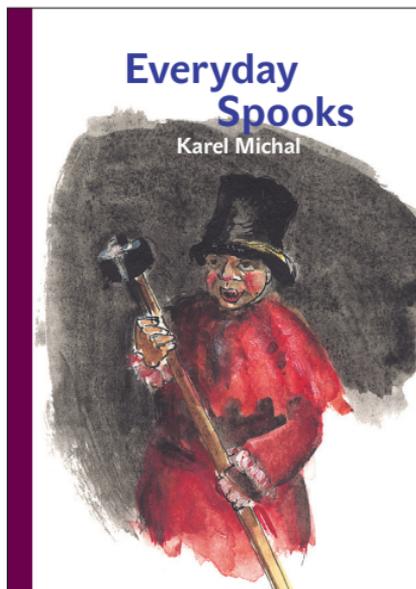
— Mark Corner

“Can you imagine yourself kicking anyone? Calmly measuring the distance and giving him a kick in the wind?”

“Good Heavens, father, I don’t know, but I can sooner imagine myself not doing it than doing it.”

“Naturally. That’s just how I have trained you. You play like girls at a dancing academy, like cherubs, like chaperones. Your legs are a good deal better bred and politer than most people’s mouths. Blockhead that I am. And now the fine football I’ve taught you will land you in the soup. Oh goodness! If only once a penalty kick had been given against us I might have some faint hope. But as it is, what can you in your innocence do against cannibals?” (p. 206).





Everyday Spooks

Karel Michal

Translated by David Short

2008 ■ 226 P. ■ ISBN 978-80-246-1494-6 ■
HARDCOVER ■ CZK 390 ■ \$ 25 ■ £ 17.50
■ ILLUSTRATED IN COLOR THROUGHOUT ■
E-BOOK (E-PUB) ■ ISBN 978-80-246-2903-2
■ CZK 270 ■ \$ 14 ■ £ 10

Prague-born Karel Michal lived a significant part of his adult life under Czechoslovakia's oppressive communist regime. Prevented from studying at a university as a young man, he cycled through a number of professions before finally turning to writing in the early 1960s. Michal's works offer a Kafkaesque perspective on the mechanism of the absurd and argue for substantial reinterpretation of the concept of ordinary life under a totalitarian regime.

With *Everyday Spooks*, Michal presents an unforgettable assortment of fantastic creatures that inhabit his strange vision of everyday reality in '50s and '60s communist Czechoslovakia. This collection of seven short stories describes bizarre encounters where the past melts into the present, ordinary people meet comic and anxious figures and interact with ghosts, and mundane speech drifts repeatedly into absurdity.

Karel Michal (1932–1984) was a Czech writer who lived and created under Czechoslovakia's oppressive communist regime and after the Prague Spring in 1968 in exile. His works include detective fiction, historical novels, short stories and screenplays.

“In each story, Michal seems to toy with his reader as he toys with his characters—and as a dead cat might toy with his prey. (...) Michal’s dead cat engages in all kinds of sedition and blasphemy—to the horror of all who converse with him—but the story itself is genius, its cat utterly logical...”
— Jeff Waxman, Review of Contemporary Fiction



“Now look here,” he said, “it’s either or. Nobody can be two things at once. Either you’re a dead cat, in which case you’ve no business speaking, or you’re a live cat and then you’ve even less business to, so make yourself scarce, I don’t want any cats here. I’m not a cattery, I’m a Czech journalist.”

“You’s a dead cat,” said the cat, “and you does have things to say.”

“Don’t you mean you’re dead?”

“Yes,” the cat acquiesced. “You’s dead, which is why you doesn’t eat.”

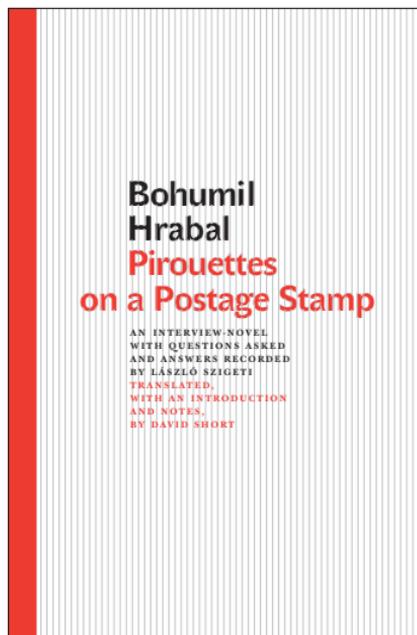
“How so?”

“You doesn’t know. Being dead doesn’t mean being an encyclopaedia.”

This was getting embarrassing. Not only was the cat apparently dead, but it either didn’t know or couldn’t sort out the various forms of the verb and seemed to lack the first-person singular completely. The reporter remembered the seven primary questions an investigating officer should ask – he had read them once in some almanac – but he couldn’t remember the order they went in. He knew the last question was ‘Why?’, but that hardly seemed to fit the bill here.

“How long have you been dead?”

“A very long time. You doesn’t know exactly, you can’t remember. You isn’t good at guessing time” (pp. 76-77).



Pirouettes on a Postage Stamp

An Interview-novel with
Questions Asked and Answers
Recorded by László Szigeti

Bohumil Hrabal

Translated with an
Introduction and Notes
by David Short

2008 ■ 192 P. ■ ISBN 978-80-246-1447-2 ■
HARDCOVER ■ CZK 390 ■ \$ 25 ■ £ 17.50
■ 1 HALFTONE PHOTOGRAPHY ■
E-BOOK (E-PUB) ■ ISBN 978-80-246-2895-0
■ CZK 270 ■ \$ 14 ■ £ 10

Novelist Bohumil Hrabal is well known for writing about political questions with humor and vivid expressiveness, Hrabal also was given to experimentation—his early novel *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age*, for example, consists of a single extended sentence.

Pirouettes on a Postage Stamp carries Hrabal's experimentation to the field of autobiography. On its surface a verbatim record of an oral interview conducted by Hungarian journalist László Szigeti, the book confuses and confounds with false starts, digressions, and philosophical asides. Yet despite all the games and distractions, Hrabal's personality shines through, compelling and unforgettable, making *Pirouette on a Postage Stamp* an unexpected treat for any lover of Czech literature.

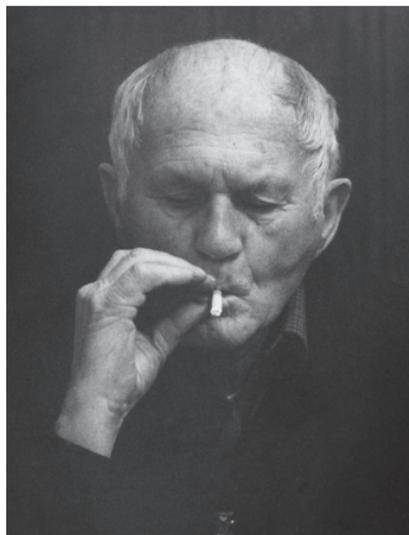
Bohumil Hrabal (1914–1997) was one of the most important Czech writers of the 20th century, and was even more central to Prague than the others. His extensive work is characterized by his original style and a deep interest in tragicomic figures from the fringes of society. His books include *Closely Watched Trains*, which was adapted into a film that won

the Academy Award for Best Foreign-Language Film in 1967, and the novel *I Served the King of England*.

László Szigeti (*1957) is a Hungarian writer and activist based in Slovakia.

“In effect, Hrabal becomes one of his own characters, wryly humorous, gently subversive, skirting round a plot made up of the details of his own life.”

— **London Review of Books**



HAVE YOU EVER CONTEMPLATED SUICIDE?

“In literary terms all the time. In literature I’d be on the point of... But to get up and head for the water, never. I’ve preferred to remain in desperation, profound melancholy. I never even asked my parents what to do, because I knew I’d get advice that was too sensible and too inappropriate to my predicament. I knew I was too young, too silly-naive, in other words I was that solid bell of ignorance that must apply to any young person, and afterwards, as you can see, I always took off. I loved football, I was even good at the game, and I’ve got fractures acquired playing. One of the high-spots for me is a Hidegkuti pirouette on a postage stamp; it’s like how to switch metaphors. *The Fascination*” (pp. 122-123).

WHAT’S YOUR MESSAGE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

“Every young person should find the plank along which he, and he alone, should walk. Every young person has his genius, each one is surrounded by a solid bell of ignorance; the most beautiful thing about a young person is a kind of defiant self-assurance, but also the sense that he is not alone in the world, that there are others besides him, that he is part of a human society. Not any society, but one which is seeking a better world even at the price that the young person is the only one still defending the essence and contours that glorious idea...” (p. 129).

About the translators

David Short works as a translator, interpreter and editor, and has published several textbooks of Czech and many publications on linguistics. From 1973 till 2011 he worked at the SSEES UCL. In addition to dozens of acclaimed translations of works of classical and contemporary fiction, he also focuses on translation of texts in literary science.

Mark Corner is a translator from Czech into English. He is the author of *Berlitz Pocket Guide to Prague*, *Discover Prague* and *Does God Exist* (together with C. C. Rowland). He currently lives in Brussels and lectures at the International Affairs Department of Versalius College in Brussels.

Ruby Hobling cooperated as a translator with the Czech exile government in London during World War II.

Eva M. Kandler is a translator originally from the Czech Republic. She has lived in Britain since 1960s.

Alex Zucker is a Brooklyn based award-winning translator of Czech literature. His translation, *Innocence; or, Murder on Steep Street*, a novel by Heda Margolius Kovály, was named to NPR's Best Books of 2015, Jáchym Topol's *The Devil's Workshop* was nominated for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and won an English PEN Award for Writing in Translation, the Typographical Translation Award, and was named to the Fiction Longlist for the Best Translated Book Award.

About the illustrator

Jiří Grus is a painter, comic-book artist and screenwriter. He gained renown particularly for his work in the field of comics. Since 1999 his comics have appeared in many domestic and foreign titles (*Aargh!*, *Crew*, *Pot*, *Zkrat* and *Živel* magazines, the *Inseminator* anthology, Polish *Komiks* catalogue, Portuguese *Comix* magazine, Greek *g* weekly and American *Heavy Metal* magazine). He received many award for comics (2000–2001: the Czech award for the best comic artist, three awards at the International Comic Festival in Lodz; 2007–2008: the Muriel best comic award for *Voleman* series). He also holds the Slow Comics Best Fanzine Award 2010 for the *Voleman* comic (Monza, Italy). In book illustrations he follows on the traditions of prestigious Czech interwar literary series.

Modern Czech Classics

Published titles

Zdeněk Jirotka: Saturnin (2003, 2005, 2009, 2013; pb 2016)

Vladislav Vančura: Summer of Caprice (2006; pb 2016)

Karel Poláček: We Were a Handful (2007; pb 2016)

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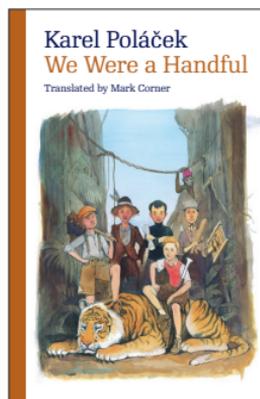
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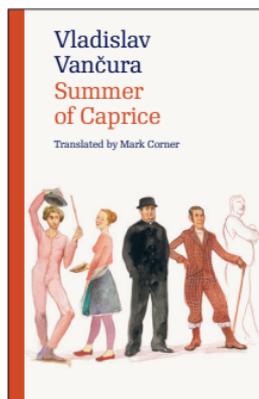


We Were a Handful

Karel Poláček

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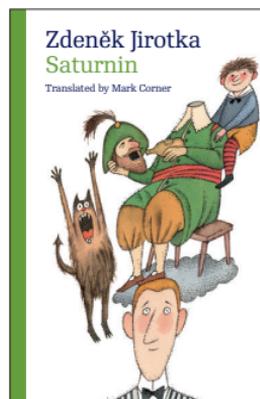


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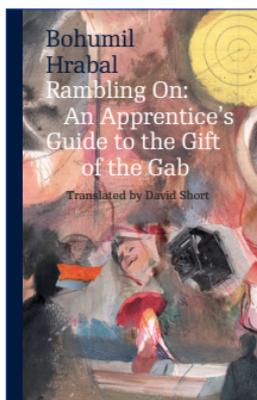


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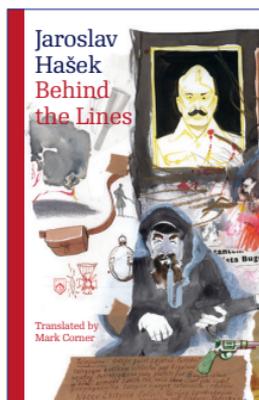
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