

*Into the Spotlight: New Writing from Slovakia* edited by Magdalena Mullek and Julia Sherwood and translated by Magdalena Mullek and Julia and Peter Sherwood, Parthian: Bloomington, Indiana, 2017, 201 pages. Available at libraries and bookstores.

*Into the Spotlight: New Writing from Slovakia* offers an interesting and efficient way to sample some of the best contemporary Slovak writers. Rather than presenting a comprehensive view into each author's work, this book is meant to be a window into contemporary Slovak writing and "spur the reader to seek out more Slovak writing in translation," according to the editors. Although Slovakia lacks the long and illustrious literary tradition of the Czechs and the Poles, Julia Sherwood says there is a "vibrant and diverse literary scene in present-day Slovakia and an explosion of new talent in the past few decades."

Each entry in the book begins with the author's photograph, a brief biography, a few words from the author, and short remarks about the entry. Also included are a helpful introduction by Magdalena Mullick and whimsical line drawings by Ivana Šáteková.

One of my favorites in the collection is an excerpt from the book, *The Mystery of the Považský Bull*, by Lukáš Luk. The protagonist, Kristián, grows up in a Slovak family whose every male ancestor for generations has played trumpet in the local brass band. At the age of 19, Kristián performs beautifully for Yugoslav television, and moves from there to Italy and France, where he finds a job on a large cruise ship. He works his way up to famous leader of the ship's orchestra. "And so Kristián," wrote Luk, "faithful to everything Grandpa Mutňanský had taught him, spread the good name of the Považec trumpet among the powerful people of the capitalist world. He was playing the trumpet and sailing the seas. What more could he have asked for?" When Kristián returns home to Považský Sokolec, he finds through humorous escapades that tomorrow won't be the same as today and that you truly cannot go home again.

I was also struck with "Denis, 63," a story excerpted from Alta Vasova's *Directory*. Denis is a painter inspired by the idea of losing his eyesight. He prepares himself for being blind by doing various activities with his eyes closed, and in his personal life, uses his newly sensitive fingers to discover the body of his lover, Nad'a. Eventually he goes to a doctor and finds there is nothing wrong with him. He gives up the idea that he is going blind and "didn't contemplate why he had succumbed to that stray, stupid idea," but he also "didn't give up the sensitivity of his ears, of his breath, or of his fingers."

Other stories find a woman as the audience of one at a circus, two fellow musicians in the Prague Symphony Orchestra falling in love, a daughter dealing with her mother's illness, and an absurdist view of capitalistic manipulation of buyers in a former communist country.

Both editors were born in and grew up in Slovakia. Magdalena Mullek moved to the United States more than 20 years ago and works as an independent translator and literary scholar. Julia Sherwood was employed by Amnesty International in the United Kingdom for more than 20 years and since 2008 has worked as a freelance translator, often with her husband Peter Sherwood, who helped translate works in this book.

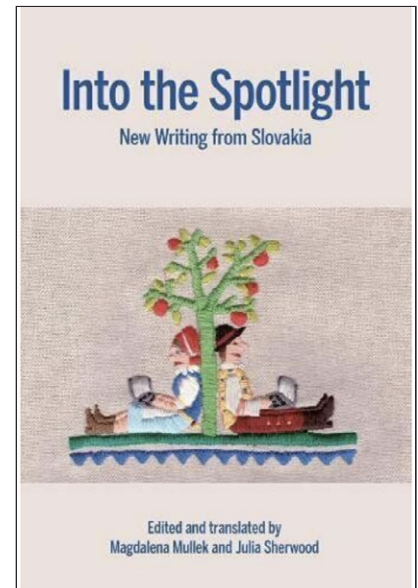
Mullek and Sherwood used these criteria to choose 16 authors and 19 selections for this book:

- Only living authors
- Authors who write in the Slovak language
- Preference given to authors who had few or no book-length publications in English
- Works published in 2000 or later
- Selections not previously published in English translation
- Quality as indicated by literary prizes awarded

The results are diverse in subjects, styles, and forms of writing by authors of differing ages, genders, and levels of fame. The book's structure also helped me identify which authors' writing I would like to explore more.

*Gwen is coordinator of the Czech and Slovak Literary Ventures book discussion group which is cosponsored by the Czech and Slovak Cultural Center of Minnesota, Czech and Slovak Sokol Minnesota, and the Office of the Honorary Consul of the Czech Republic.*

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**Join us on Saturday, April 24**  
for a discussion of the memoir,  
***Reluctant Witness*, by Jarda Cervenka at 10 a.m.**  
and Jarda's talk on ***The Importance***  
**of Reading Nonfiction Today at 11 a.m.**  
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