

The Zátopek run

The Czech Centre London and the Thames Valley Harriers athletic club have teamed up to celebrate the legendary Czech runner and four-time Olympic winner Emil Zátopek.

The Emil Zátopek Run, which offers the choice to join either a 5K (adults), 3K (under 13 years old) or 2K (under 11 years old) distance run, has been organised to coincide with Zátopek's 100th birthday – on September 19 – and will raise funds for the newly founded Zátopek's Athletic Fellowship.

"We are excited about the prospect of celebrating the centennial anniversary of perhaps the best runner of all time Emil Zátopek by launching, in collaboration with Thames Valley Harriers, the Zátopek Athletic Fellowship to support talented young runners from local disadvantaged communities," said Přemysl Pella, director of the Czech Centre.

Emil Zátopek started to run in 1940 when he was randomly chosen by the famous shoe-making Czech factory Baťa, his workplace at the time, to represent the company in a local run. Despite Zátopek's initial hesitancy, he came second and found a new focus in life.

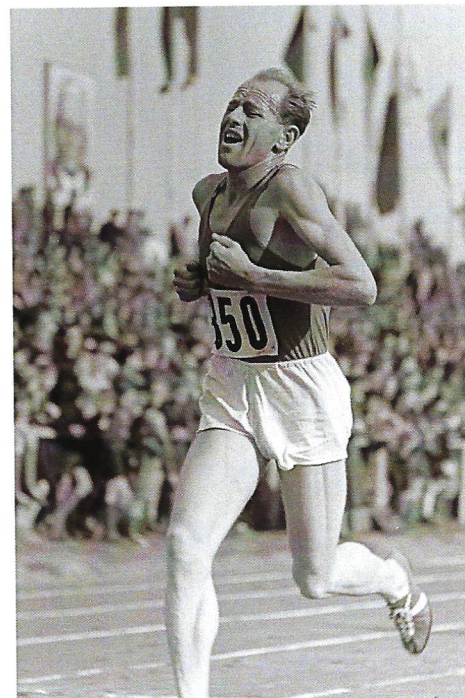
He went on to become a phenomenon in the athletic world, known for his many achievements including his first two Olympic medals from London in 1948, his brilliant Olympic gold hat-trick on all long distance runs and the marathon in Helsinki in 1952,

and setting 18 world records.

Besides his athletic accomplishments, Zátopek also received international acclaim for his vocal condemnation of the 1968 Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, which led to his denunciation by the communist government and a controlled detention in the countryside, away from his home in Prague. His moral stance, modesty and extraordinary sportsmanship remain inspirational to this day, both in Zátopek's native Czech Republic and around the world.

The public's continuous interest in Zátopek's character has recently been reflected in a great reception of the new feature film *Zátopek* (2021), which had its international premiere at London's Vue West End last November (as well as Richard Askwith's book *Today We Die a Little!: The Inimitable Emil Zátopek, The Greatest Olympic Runner of All Time*).

All proceeds from The Zátopek Run will be donated to support Zátopek's Athletic Fellowship, which aims to ignite in young athletes the sporting and personal attributes that Zátopek represented and help to further advance their athletic careers. The run will culminate with a medal ceremony to award the winners, followed by an informal gathering at the Linford Christie Athletic Stadium to celebrate Zátopek's anniversary with light refreshments.



"If you want to run, run a mile. If you want to experience a different life, run a marathon": Emil Zátopek.

Slovak literature on the rise

SlovakLiterature.Com is celebrating its third birthday. Co-founder **Julia Sherwood** describes the origins of the website.

Slovak literature is often regarded as one of the "smaller", or even "minor", literatures, although I prefer the term "less translated literatures", as a more apt definition of books that are underrepresented on the Anglophone market.

This has certainly been the case for decades, although those interested in reading Slovak writers in English have lately had a bigger choice and Slovak literature is no longer the neglected Cinderella.

The statistics speak for themselves: while between 1950 and 1980 a total of 15 books by Slovak authors appeared in English, the following 40 years, 1980 to 2000, saw a slight increase, to 18 books, and the last 20 years, from 2002 to 2022, marked a real explosion, with 62 books published.

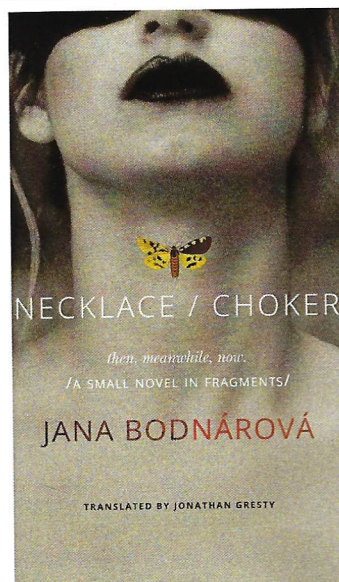
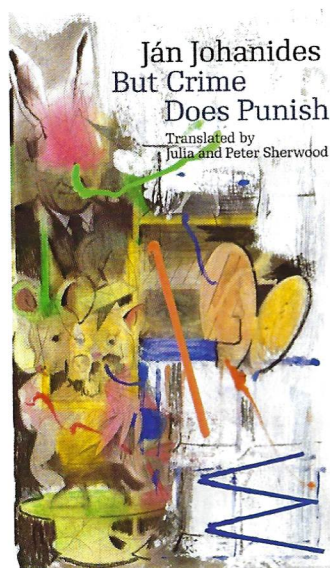
Most recently, two publishers with worldwide distribution and excellent promotional muscle have started a new series presenting Slovak literature in translation.

In 2021 Seagull Books, a highly acclaimed publisher based in Kolkata, launched a Slovak List with Monika Kompaníková's *Boat Number Five* (translated by Janet Livingstone) and Jana Bodnářová's *Necklace/Choker* (translated by Jonathan Gresty) in



Left: Julia Sherwood.

Bottom left: *But Crime Does Punish* by Ján Johanides and published by Karolinum Books. Bottom right: Jana Bodnářová's *Necklace/Choker*, published by Seagull Books.



October 2021, with two further titles due later this year and another four in the pipeline. And in June 2022, Karolinum Books in Prague published *But Crime Does Punish* by Ján Johanides (translated by myself and my husband Peter Sherwood), inaugurating its Modern Slovak Classics series.

These recent developments are particularly heartening but the tide had already begun to turn by 2019 with the approach of the 30th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia. The anticipated renewed public interest in the events of 1989 in Czechoslovakia as well as in Central and Eastern Europe in general seemed to offer a great opportunity for putting Slovak culture and literature on the map.

I, therefore, decided to take the bull by the horns and organise a series of events. Held across the UK in October and November 2019, the festival – headlined Raising the Velvet Curtain – featured talks and discussions with award-winning writers and filmmakers, a one-day academic conference on contemporary Slovak literature at UCL London (the first since 1988), as well as theatre and dance performances and a writers' tour.

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The short story sisterhood

Ivana Dobráková is rather different from most contemporary Slovak authors in that she leads a parallel life in Turin working as a literary translator. She is widely celebrated as the brilliant translator of pseudonymous Italian author Elena Ferrante, writes Anna Gács.

Mothers and Truckers, a collection of five “long short stories”, won her the EU Prize for Fiction in 2020 and was published in English by Jantar Publishing in June 2022. The text was translated from the original Slovak by Julia and Peter Sherwood.

Just as in her previous short story collections, she again focuses on the private sphere and micro-society, on family relations, love affairs, friendships, small-town communities. Dobráková was born in Bratislava when it was still part of Czechoslovakia; she lived through the collapse of state socialism and the break-up of the country as a young child.

She inhaled the economic and political optimism of the first years of democracy as well as the disappointment that was soon to follow, and she moved to Italy as a young adult, gaining first-hand experience of the newly enlarged Europe. While she includes elements of all this in the historical and political

background of her protagonists, they crop up only as occasional hints.

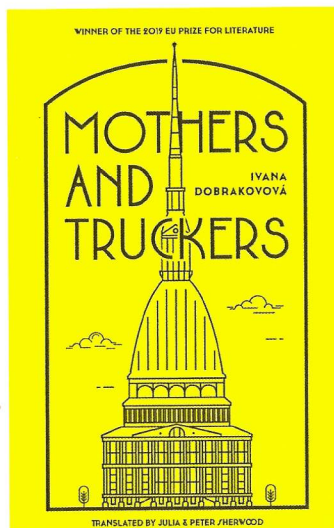
The first story in the volume, *Father*, for example, recalls a familiar East-European male prototype, a well-meaning but weak man pursuing naïve and hopeless economic enterprises, while struggling with alcohol and mental problems. And the very last story, *Veronika*, takes us to post-communist Slovakia at the time of the dissolving borders.

This vision of a borderless world is more the product of the narrator’s bizarre imagination than reality: she compensates for her rather dull life in Bratislava by spending most of her time sex-chatting with and daydreaming about men – truckers, farmers and the like – from around the world.

The short stories in *Mothers and Truckers* are also linked by the lyricism of Dobráková’s style. Rhapsodic thoughts are conveyed by a carefully crafted language that breathes together with the narrators.

This language can create cathartic moments even at the most unexpected points. One of the most memorable being the description of the birth of a foal, a beautiful moment of hope after a distressing confession.

Some of the motives weaving



through the stories are reinforced by literary-cultural references scattered throughout the volume. For example, overtly or covertly, Dobráková invokes many of the representations of mental distress from Sylvia Plath through Roman Polanski to Robert Altman. And Pier Paolo Pasolini – a literary evening based on writings by the notorious Italian director – acts as the gravitational force for two very different women in two different short stories.

But it is not only the web of cultural references that creates

parallelisms and hidden connections between the narrators. The most striking motive that appears in all of the short stories is the looming figure of the mother. All five women have this in common: the suffocating presence of their imperious, querulous mother(s), who “spreads like mildew around the window. She devours everything that happens to find itself in her way. Overpowers it, suppresses it. She’s everywhere” (Olivia).

While the five narrators in the five stories, despite all their parallelisms, have distinct features, the mother who appears in each of the stories seems in every case to be the same character. Seen by the daughters as a figure of almost mythical proportions, crippling them, condemning them to an eternal childhood, the mother figure creates another kind of kinship between these troubled, somewhat pathetic, sometimes heroic, often comical, and even more often loveable women. She makes them secret sisters, their ties running through many a year and many a mile.

● Taken from Anna Gács’s introduction to *Mothers and Truckers*, published by Jantar Publishing. Available to buy from selected bookstores and www.JantarPublishing.com

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The tour featured new translations by three Slovak writers, *The Night Circus* by Uršula Kovalyk (published by Parthian Books), and *Bellevue* by Ivana Dobráková as well as *Big Love* by Balla (published by Jantar Publications).

I was able to secure funding for the tour and the additional marketing thanks to the generous support for the whole project from Arts Council England, the Slovak Arts Council, and the Slovak Embassy, which resulted in an unprecedented crop of reviews – some half-dozen for each of the three books.

The final element of the *Raising the Velvet Curtain* project, intended to continue beyond 2019 and be its lasting legacy, was the website SlovakLiterature.Com. Having developed and designed it jointly with a translator friend, Magdaléna Mülle, and her husband Paul, who provides technical support, we launched it on September 11, 2019.

Initially the focus was on the three new books by Balla, Dobráková and Kovalyk included in the UK tour, but right from the start our ambition has been to turn the website into a comprehensive portal for works of Slovak literature translated into English and give this former Cinderella a stage to

show her talents.

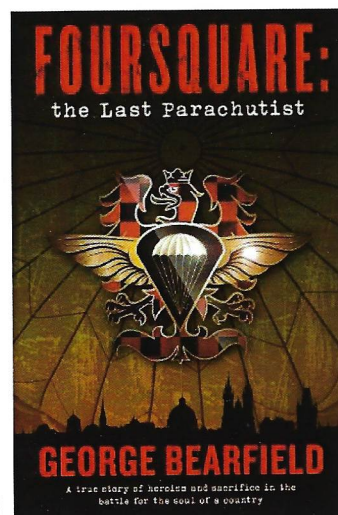
Three years on, SlovakLiterature.Com features the profiles of 24 Slovak writers and details of their books that have appeared in English since 2002: 37 works of prose, poetry and books for children, as well as five anthologies. Each book and author page includes links to reviews, relevant articles and interviews as well as samples from the translations and many other useful resources, including a regularly updated list of Slovak books in English translation since 1950.

The site has been attracting a steadily increasing number of visitors, rising from 1,473 unique visitors from September to December 2019 to 5,460 in 2020, to 9,140 in 2021, to nearly 7,000 in the first seven months of this year.

And while we may not have covered absolutely everything – after all, we run the website on a voluntary basis, in our spare time from translating and other activities promoting Slovak literature – we are very proud of what we have achieved in this short time with our limited resources.

We hope that everyone keen on catching up on the latest Slovak writing in English will find something of interest. Do check out our website to see for yourself.

<http://slovakliterature.com>



Lives of the parachutists

The book *Foursquare: the Last Parachutist* by George Bearfield is an account of the operations of the Czechoslovak parachutists trained by the British Special Operations Executive during the Second World War, writes Edward Peacock.

It begins before the war and goes through the occupation of Czechoslovakia, telling of the often convoluted journeys of the future parachutists from their

hometown until they arrive in Britain after the fall of France.

George Bearfield is the grandson of Jaroslav Bublík, one of the parachutists, and the book is structured around the author’s quest to discover what happened when his grandfather was assigned to the unit’s final mission in May 1945. Jaroslav’s cousin Josef was also a parachutist, sent into Czechoslovakia in 1942 and one of the thousands killed in the aftermath of Operation Anthropoid, that saw the assassination of the hated Reinhard Heydrich.

In *Foursquare* I really wanted to read on and on in all three of the book’s narratives: the author’s own quest to find out what actually happened in this key part of his family history, the stories of the parachutists sent from Britain into occupied Czechoslovakia, and the sad history of that land in those turbulent years. And I was unprepared for the twist at the end, when the author discovers the truth.

There are useful appendices including biographical sketches of the participants, and summaries of the different parachute missions, as well as a bibliography and helpful notes. *Foursquare: the Last Parachutist* by George Bearfield is published by Thought Four Ltd. ISBN 978-1-5272-8656-6.

Review

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Issue 185

Dinner date

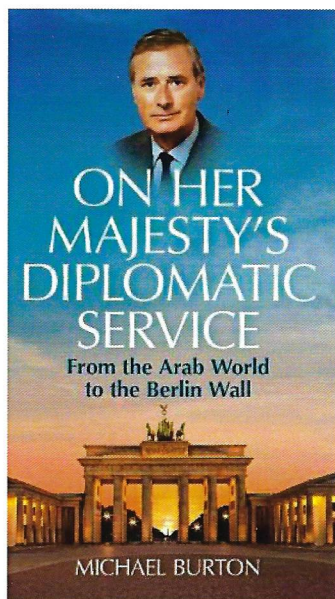
The BCSA's 2022 Annual Dinner will be held on the evening of Wednesday November 23, at the May Fair Hotel, Stratton Street, Mayfair, London, W1J 8LT. (The nearest tube station is Green Park.)

Note that the day of the week and the venue are different from those in recent years. The event will be held jointly with the Czech British Chamber of Commerce.

This highlight in the BCSA calendar is a wonderful opportunity for Slovaks, Czechs and Britons to mingle in a convivial atmosphere, to meet old friends and make new ones. Members and non-members alike will be made welcome.

Further details will be issued on the BCSA website, in the *Review* and via our e-mail mailing list. To get on that list contact the BCSA:

bcsa@bcsa.co.uk



BCSA president to give talk on autobiography at Czech Embassy

On September 13 Sir Michael Burton, former chairman and now president of the BCSA, will be in discussion with Dr Jana Buresova about his diplomatic memoirs.

A wide-ranging and fascinating account of his thirty-seven-year career, entitled *On Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service: From the Arab World to the Berlin Wall*, the book culminates in his three-year mission as British Ambassador in Prague in the early nineties. It was, of course, a crucial time of transition after the Velvet Revolution.

The author came to know presidents Havel and Klaus well as they led those changes.

The book was reviewed in the February/March issue of the *Review*.

Sir Michael will also touch upon his experience in the Middle East and in Berlin, at the focal point of the Cold War.

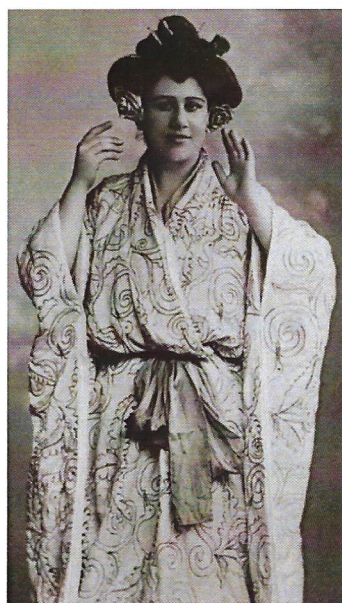
There will be an opportunity for questions, and Sir Michael will sign copies of his book, for sale at a special discount for the event.

Light refreshments will also be available after the talk.

Booking details to follow on the Events page of the BCSA website, www.bcsa.co.uk

This event is organised with the kind co-operation of the Czech Embassy.

Gala concert marks Emmy Destinn Foundation's 25 years



Emmy Destinn as Cio Cio San in Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*.

To celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Emmy Destinn Foundation, there will be a Gala Concert on October 23, under the auspices of HE Mrs Marie Chatardová, Czech Ambassador to the UK, writes *Jarmila Karas*.

It will feature brilliant young artists, the winners of our biennial competition The Emmy Destinn Young Singers Awards, performing arias by Janáček, Dvořák, Smetana, Mozart and Puccini. They will be accompanied by pianists Raya Kostova, Panaretos Kyriatidis and Max Bilbe, winners of the Lady Grenfell-Baines Accompanist's Prize.

The concert will also feature the talented Czech violinist Leona Gogolycynová, accompanied by the celebrated pianist Anthony Hewitt, and the renowned Swedish trumpeter

Magnus Johansson, who performed at the inaugural Emmy Destinn Foundation concert in 1997.

The evening will be presented by voice-over actress and narrator Veronika Hyks.

The foundation is dedicated to upholding the legacy of Emmy Destinn, the greatest Czech diva, by supporting talented young singers and preserving the traditional cultural link between Britain and the Czech Republic, as well as cultivating awareness of the Czech repertoire's great riches.

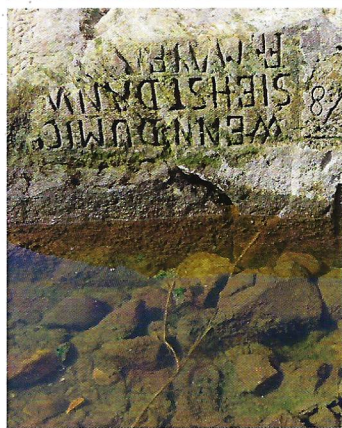
Tickets are available at £25, £15 and £10; Young Friends £5. St John's, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HA Tel +44 (0) 7222 1061.

For tickets and further information, please visit:

www.sjss.org.uk/events/emmy-destinn-foundation



Soprano Caroline Taylor, Destinn Foundation winner in 2021.



Czech hunger stone resurfaces

The hot summer and drought across Europe has been exposing hunger stones on the Labe river in Czechia.

The stones are actually rocks with messages cut into them by people who have endured similar climate conditions in the past.

"If you see me then weep," reads the warning on a rock exposed by low water levels on the river near Děčín, in north west Bohemia. Some markings on the stone date back to 1417 with others from 1616.

The inscription, in German, marked the point where water traffic could no longer operate because of

the low levels in the river. Other warning stones appear on the Rhine, Danube and Moselle.

The stone near Děčín also has an inscription, probably from 1938: "Neplač holka, nenařkej, když je sucho, pole stříkej" (Girl, don't weep and moan, if it's dry, water the field).

The stone was also visible during the drought of 2018.

In the UK in Derbyshire, cropmarks at Chatsworth's formal garden have become visible again. The garden dates to 1699 and was once filled with flowerbeds and paths. It was grassed over by 1730.

Correction

In our tribute to Peter Kysel in the last issue of the *Review* he was described as the BCSA's inaugural chairman. This was inaccurate.

Peter was our first elected chairman; the chairman at the association's launch in 1990 was in fact the late Graham Melville-Mason, chairman of the Dvořák Society and subsequently vice-president of the BCSA.

Peter was elected chairman in 1992, at our first AGM. Our apologies for this error.