

Literature? And what is it?

Written by Ivan Hudec

Saturday, 17 October 2009 22:10 - Last Updated Monday, 20 September 2010 21:15

National Slovak Newspaper (Slovenské národné noviny)

October 6, 1992

(Founded on August 1, 1845)

Tatra Eagle (OROL TATRÁNSKI)

Supplement: Literature and Art 9/1992 Volume 2 (5)

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I do not know, maybe nothing ...

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Everything!

A variety of answers to such a double question in the title, say an essay, maybe can be looked for even between these two: Nothing and Everything. And even among us there will be more than a few of those who would answer the same way.

If we read the first historical records of humankind more carefully – perhaps writing of ancient Chaldeans engraved into Babylonian bricks, then we could read this: Beltis, his mistress induced Uruk, a godly king of Ur and Akkad to build her a temple.

A century and a half ago the ruins of Nineveh were discovered, and among other things there were giant stone bulls found in the main entrance of the Sancherib's palace. They were over 6 meters tall and long, and the following writing was engraved on them:

Isaiah, King of Judah, has not surrendered to my will. I have conquered 46 of his largest cities and fortresses and innumerable villages depending on them, and I have carried away my booty. And I was besieging Isaiah himself in Jerusalem, his own capitol. I cut off fortified cities from under his rule and gave them over to the kings of Ascalon, Ekron and Gaza in order to make his country smaller. I have added more to the original fees and determined their nature. This chronicle record reflects events from 2500 years ago, and it can be read at the British Museum even today. On the third count, let us remember the message of a 4000 year-old clay tablet from ancient Crete. On it there are pictures of sacks of wheat, pictures of ears of wheat and get load of this world, other inscriptions that can be translated from acrophonic writing:

**TI TU PÁ
ŠČAKÁ, KUPA(č) PÍTÁ SI TÚ(r), JÁR-Ě MÍ(r) NI KIŠĚ. ŠČĚ TA PÚ(t) KU RUKU(s). ÁRA ĚME
A TÚ(r) AÍ**

(pronounced as

**TI TU PAH SHCHAKAH, KUPA(ch) PEETAH SI TOO(r), JAHR-IE MEE(r) NI KISHIE. SHCHIE
TA POO(t) KU RUKU(s). AHRA ME A TOO(r) AEE**

).

This we can compare to the following in the Slovak language what the farmer of ancient Crete really engraved in the tablet

**TEBA TU PÁN ČAKÁ, KUPEC, PÝTA SI TURA (BÝKA). JAR JE MIERNA, NEPRŠÍ. CHCE
TIEŽ PUTO DO RUKY SI (VZIAŤ). (ALE) POLIA SÚ MOJE A TUR (BÝK) AJ (TIEŽ)**

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(in English:

THE LORD AWAITS YOU HERE, BUYER, ASKS FOR A BOVID (BULL). SPRING IS MILD, IT DOES NOT RAIN. HE WANTS (TO TAKE) THE ROPE IN HIS HANDS. (BUT) THE FIELDS ARE MINE AND THE BOVID (BULL) TOO (ALSO)

).

The first written records contain everything. They are a documentation of economy, receipts, and it is a chronicle – a record of historical events and outpouring of a human soul, which bears almost poetic characteristics. They are even ejaculations of horror, as for example a Bratislavan Pavol Krizko found them on a hill Smrcnik near Brodina in 1865: **THEY ARE STRANGLING US**

- **NÚ DÚ(ch) (pronounced as NOO DOO (kh)**

).

Three thousand years ago, someone engraved the short record – a memorial inscription done in a similar manner to ours.

Thus began the art of writing – it did not differentiate among genres. In an impressive congruence there were also often records about property, personal notes, decorative and beautiful phrases, outpouring of horror and cruel facts, all next to each other. The art of writing as a whole was all embracing, connecting wisdom and beauty. The wisdom most often manifested itself by refined facts for the future, education, argumentation and recording technical production procedures as those of goldsmiths, for example. Also there existed a beauty, present in its noticeable grandeur, perhaps of famous, perhaps of sad yet unrepeatable moments, expressions of love and desires. Also recording of stories was teaching the meditative and contemplative to use the records for amusement, particularly articulating the assertion that has the power to convince the listener or reader. It was an era of writing, which was everything that had ever been written ...

This type of unified writing, sometimes very austere, yet lavish and detailed, grew up from its diapers. The human soon discovered amazing priorities and vast possibilities of writing. The use of writing has been the most significant accelerator of civilization and a unifier of humankind in spite of dissimilarities in languages, customs and historical experiences. The art of writing was constantly becoming an ever more patulous tree putting forth thick branches: a literature of scientific, documentary, practical and beautiful, i. e. artistic literature.

For ages, for instance, a philosophical, travel or historical literature has been branching out from the initial literary stream. On the other hand, the so-called pure artistic literature has as if defended itself against a complete separation of independent “genres” in writing and could not

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even speak about the literature as unique except for several experimental artistic streams that have never crossed their search borders.

When we started reflecting upon literature, we clearly meant it to be an artistic literature. It is an individual kind of artistic expression, whose medium of expression is a word or sentence. Since the sentence is a carrier of an exactly defined thought, it has a certain individuality distancing itself from an absolute abstraction such as is characteristic for music, let us say. And it is here where the biggest peripetia of literature begins.

Many a casual reader of a more abstract poetry will stop reading the verses after a short attempt. Yes, the reader will stop reading – because while looking at the text, his/her strong reading reflex will teach him/her only to read. To understand only the basic message born by a letter. In exaggeration, it can be said that the reader is a pupil, a little first grader, who is although familiar with all letters, but does not yet know how to read a word and understand the message of the writing that bears a different signal in addition to an exact sound of each letter – a meaning hidden in the word and a thought depicted by the sentence. Perhaps the reader will express himself/herself nonetheless: “And who will take the curse off the hidden cross-word puzzle phrase, obscure meaning of a verse or poem?” During a concert the person will probably grumble: “First, an interpreter has to bother with note writing and now me – the listener. It is even worse than standing in front of an abstract painting. It is like in a case of a poem.”

Here we are talking about a poem, but with an equal ease we can assume a stance on a prosaic text; sentences of a novel, story and fiction. A poem and prose, lyrics and stories have not broken up. They have not followed examples of other types of writing growing on their own branches of the tree of knowledge, which were immortalized by writing. Despite many bravados of the contemporary scientific writing, say a philosophical tract or scientific essay, which started reflecting on common letter origins with a cut-and-dry recording and beauty, there has remained a domain of artistic writing in both forms, lyric and epic, identical efforts, equal intentions and means and striving for an elusive feeling of beauty for a recipient of the message.

Quite a few lamentations have already filled reflections about acceptance of art, demand for culture and art, let say, a hunger for literature. This initiative has obviously stemmed from the assumption that if there are no illiterates, there will be enough of those, who although may not

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seek artistic literature directly, they will at least from time to time not reject it. Today a modern type of these heralds of generalities appears in a garment of video media worshippers foretelling even a complete extinction of the unnecessary literacy acquired through sweat of blood. There is the phenomenon of a television screen and picture keyboard of computer tentacles pertaining to the omnipresent octopus of an unlimited communication ...

The fact remains that a group of art confessors segregates itself from the whole society, say the musical one – although songs are sung or liked by all. Everyone can manage to draw up a plan for placing the furniture in a house, and pick through it, choose colors for the wall and appearance of construction plans for a family house. But nobody will ever visit exhibitions of an academic painter, who along with his relatives and neighbors is known by such people even though the painter comes from a neighboring village. The same goes for the literate illiterate.

Now let us talk about illiteracy, a certain kind of inability to understand or communicate in a certain way that most people can handle and look for to enrich themselves, their experiences and their interior world energetically just as they satisfy their thirst, hunger and other desires. Literacy is not only a passion for uncovering secrets or mapping the unknown – it is particularly about an urge to satisfy one's own basic needs. In this case the spiritual ones.

A healthy newborn is gifted with all abilities. It has at least average gifts to learn not only how to walk and talk, run and jump, sing and invent stories, but it is even a potential gymnast, marathon runner, pop-music singer, shopping window designer, photographer or crime news reporter. Its development mostly depends on the environment, incentives and upbringing. It can be said that it mainly loses its original gifts. At a certain age, it will hopelessly miss the turn-off on the crossroads of life which could have led it to the Olympic stage of winners in swimming, figure skating or gymnastics, and maybe even much sooner the turn-off on the crossroads which would give it a chance to painlessly master two or three foreign languages. Thus it leaves behind one opportunity after another. There are exceptions, however, which are "cultivated" and make people specialists. Then they become unique geniuses in chess, playing a musical instrument or other incursions into the wallets of wealthy sponsors and snobs.

The need for an intensive and regular physical activity is natural from the smallest young. Nature has ensured the health of an individual so that production of endomorphins (a substance with morphine effects) in the human pulls the person to protect his/her health and live a life to the full extent like an addiction. In spite of this intensive protection, the person can easily lose this kind of need. By not listening to an internal calling and strength of will to achieve other prioritized goals, this natural need will die out like an unused limb that has dwarfed and withered away or like a formerly admired craftsmanship or talent that has become forgotten.

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Lack of cultivating and developing the ability to understand an artistic text has the same consequences. The ability to understand expressions of metaphors and comparisons together with words and their original meanings will not develop. Parables, biblical metaphors, produce an artistic text out of religion, and they were some of the early instruments of education leading to beauty. Folk songs, sayings, weather lore and even nicknames are a literary alphabet that we learn. How we then develop and use it depends on us.

Calling for general literary, other artistic or cultural orgies overpowering everything and everyone are romantic and revolutionary ideas of those who want to change the world by force and at once under their control where possible. Ignoring the reality of current times, when a person leaves himself/herself to fate and freedom of impossibility to make a choice due to lack of information is yet another thing, and in this cause called "literature" it may be essential for us today. What is essential is the fact that according to the society's agreement of participants covered by the constitution and laws the state does not guarantee an equal opportunity to any member of the society in choosing creative activities, development of one or other personal qualities or maybe others that preserve the human ability to keep in touch with beauty, art and artistic literature. Often the personal initiative is a tough choice. If it leads into the field of art and beauty, it usually is not accompanied by a reflex of self-defense that would justify a fight for bare survival. Nevertheless, it has another quality – fulfillment of what is essential in the human life – quality of life itself. But that is a topic for the most serious deliberations, connected with an idea of what is the contradictory **concept of life**.

A poem can be cited easier. In conclusion, therefore, here is an excerpt from **Rasto Dobos' novel The Balance Sheet**:

Brshleek left the boarding house. He was hoping that soon enough he would get to the land of magic; and if by some chance he would not, he would go fishing and there he definitely would not be bothered by anyone. Tons of colorful toys landed from upstairs. As if they had fallen from heaven. One of them he stuck in his pocket. He finally got to the horizon. The horizon was all blue because a forest of blue pear-trees was starting here, and not because of anything else more comprehensible. It was beyond comprehension. He bit into one of the little pears. Its taste of unripeness drew his jaws together with a thick metal chain having a big rusted through lock. He struggled through the dense forest, step by step, from branch to rock, from branch to branch. Brushwood was massaging his body to the point of bleeding. The giant chain was snagging on every protrusion, and it was jingling horrendously. Brshleek was looking for a magic well.

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