

## Book World Prague 2020 to Showcase Diversity of Polish Literature, Andrzej Sapkowski Its Main Star

For the 26th Book World Prague, the international book fair and literary festival's organisers chose Poland as the main guest. The programme to be held at the Holešovice exhibition grounds in Prague on May 14 to 17 is the result of Czech-Polish co-operation and its most distinctive feature is diversity. Its visitors will meet authors of popular crime novels, some of the most remarkable prose writers, as well as authors of renowned Polish poetry – slam poetry included. The list of the most eagerly awaited guests is headed by the doyen of Polish fantasy literature Andrzej Sapkowski. Author of the *Witcher* saga, which has achieved cult following, returns to the festival after ten years. The multifaceted nature of Polish culture will also be reflected by The Book Night, introducing a rich blend of genres, colourful children's programme, and debates focusing on the famed Polish school of reportage.

The star attraction of the Polish programme will no doubt be **Andrzej Sapkowski**. His *The Witcher* counts among a handful of Central European literary characters to have established themselves in the mainstream of global pop culture. The taciturn tamer of monsters, hero made famous not just by books but also computer games and most recently a Netflix series, will be presented at the fair by his celebrated author together with **Tomasz Bagiński**, leading representative of contemporary Polish animation. He also collaborated on the computer game version of *The Witcher* and now acts as executive producer of the eponymous TV series, which dominated audience charts by the close of 2019.

A visit to the Polish programme is also recommended for the simple reason that this year's guest lineup might well include a future winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. Poland currently boasts six Nobel Prize winners, and last year's laureate **Olga Tokarczuk** visited the Czech Republic on several occasions in the past, also as a Book World Prague guest. She also featured among the confirmed guests of this year's event, but the many duties connected with the ultimate literary award eventually led her to cancel her entire schedule of public appearances until summer. However, she still hopes to meet with her Czech readers and we can look forward to her visit sometime in the future.

The Polish delegation will, nonetheless, include last year's laureates of other literary awards, among them **Mariusz Szczygieł** – the recent winner of Poland's most prestigious literary award Nike and one of the best known Poles in the Czech Republic. Besides presenting his



latest book *Nie ma*, he will also introduce the Czech public to one remarkable Polish literary phenomenon – that of literary reportage. **Wiesław Myśliwski**, a two-time Nike winner and one of the living classics of Polish prose, will present Czech translations of his works. Debates will be attended, among other, by **Marek Cichocki**, winner of the Józef Mackiewicz Prize for essays, and reporter **Jack Fairweather**, laureate of the prestigious British Costa Award. Although Jack writes in English, he is linked to the programme of this year's guest of honour by the topic he addresses – the story of Witold Pilecki, a voluntary prisoner at Auschwitz.

Poland's programme selection is rich and varied. In co-operation with the book fair organisers it will present everything from major novels focusing on the complexities of Central European history, through some vigorous slam poetry and hipster cookbooks for joggers all the way to children's literature. *"If your last visit to Poland was, say, a decade ago, you will be surprised how quickly it changes. I don't just mean new motorways or the skyscrapers of Warsaw. Alongside them, new museums and galleries are emerging and living culture experiences boisterous growth. At the same time Poland is a country with intense interest in its history and traditions. Literature, theatre and film are the first to mirror these discussions. It is this diverse and often contradictory country that we wish to present,"* says the director of the Polish Institute in Prague Maciej Ruczaj.

The best opportunity to experience Poland with all the senses are Friday's extended opening hours – **The Book Night**. The Gauč ve Stromovce venue will feature, among other, a staging of **Wojciech Tomczyk's** drama *Nurnberg*. The **Tęgie Chłopy** band will make visitors dance with its modern versions of traditional songs, and exquisite tastes of Polish cuisine will be offered. Fans of slam poetry will no doubt appreciate a lineup composed of the Czech masters Dr. Filipitch, Anatol Svahilec or Mr. Fenek, who will share the stage with Rudka Zydell (2018 Champion of Poland) and Wojtek Cichoń a.k.a Kidd, an experienced and noteworthy slammer situated on the verge between rap and spoken word. Visitors need not worry that language will be an issue with Polish slam as performances will be subtitled.

This year is also made exceptional by another fact – the Polish-Czech co-operation resulted in both countries changing guard in May as guests of honour of the Prague and Warsaw book fairs. *"This reciprocity was very much what we aimed for, as it emphasises the importance of literature and culture in developing relations between Poles and Czechs, as well as within the entire Central European region and the Visegrád Four,"* stresses Dariusz Jaworski, director of the Polish Book Institute (Instytut Książki), main organiser of Poland's participation in the book fair. Book World Prague's programme will thus articulate the interest and significance assigned to Czech culture by Polish audiences, complete with reflections on the influence of Hrabal on Polish prose or various Polish authors' perspectives in writing about Czech topics. Both book fairs will also feature the joint readings of author duos, among them **Martyna Bunda** and **Petra Hůlová** or **Marzanna Kielar** and **Petr Hruška**.



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*“Besides the art of Polish reportage, Czech readers were especially intrigued by Polish **children’s books**. This interest has also translated to Czech bookshop shelves, which is why the Polish national display will include a children’s corner with a mixed programme of presentations and workshops for the youngest readers. The National Museum’s Lapidarium will feature a large exhibition of illustrations for children,”* added Lucie Zakopalová, programmes coordinator of the Polish presentation.

Book World Prague audiences can get the first taste of Poland’s programmes even before the 26th annual event kicks off. **Marta Dzido**, filmmaker and winner of the European Union Prize for Literature, will arrive in Prague from Brno already in April. On April 6 and 7, accompanying events of the book fair will commence with a Polish-Czech debate entitled Dimensions of Pleasure – a discussion on the romance novel between Marta Dzido and Jan Němec at the Václav Havel Library, and first Czech screening of the film *Mr. T* – story of an extravagant writer set against the grey backdrop of Stalinist Warsaw. The screening is organised by Book World Prague together with the 3Kino festival.

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