



**November 2017**

### **Tatjana Debeljački vs. Pavol Janik**

#### **Interview**

Mgr. art. Pavol Janik, PhD., (magister artis et philosophiae doctor) was born in 1956 in Bratislava. This virtuoso of Slovak literature, Pavol Janik, is a poet, dramatist, prose writer, translator, publicist and copywriter. His literary activities focus mainly on poetry.

#### **Can you tell us something about your hometown and growing up?**

Bratislava is the capital of the Slovak Republic. Bordering Austria and Hungary, it is the only national capital that borders two sovereign states. The city is in southwestern part of our country, occupying both banks of the Danube River and the left bank of the River Morava.

Bratislava received its contemporary name in 1919. Until then, it was mostly known in English by its German name, Pressburg, as it was long dominated by German-speakers.

Other alternative names of the city in the past include Greek: Ιστρόπολις / Istropolis (meaning "Danube City") Latin: Posonium, Slovak: Prešporok, Czech:

Prešpurk, Hungarian: Pozsony, French::Presbourg, Italian: Presburgo, Romanian: Pojon, Serbian: Požun / Пожун.

It was the capital of the Kingdom of Hungary (1536–1784) and the seat of the Hungarian Parliament (1542–1848).

The city has been home to many Slovak, Hungarian and German historical figures and cultural personalities.

After World War I and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Slovaks and Czechs established Czechoslovakia. First Slovak Republic (1939–1945) existed in World War II as a German satellite. In 1945, Czechoslovakia was re-established as a Soviet satellite. In 1989, the Velvet Revolution ended a totalitarian system in Czechoslovakia. Slovakia became an independent state on January, 1 1993 after the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia, sometimes known as the Velvet Divorce.

Slovakia is a country with a very high standard of living, of civil liberties, press freedom, internet freedom, democratic governance and peacefulness. It is a combination of market economy with social security system. Citizens of Slovakia are provided with universal health care, free education and one of the longest paid maternity leave. The country joined the European Union in 2004. Slovakia is also a member of the Schengen Area, Eurozone, NATO and various important international institutions (including the Visegrad Group, also called V4, which is a cultural and political alliance of four Central European states – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia).

During the Cold War, a distance between the historical center of Bratislava and the Iron Curtain (the Austrian border) was only 3 kilometers, so Austrian broadcasting (radio and television) was available in the capital of Slovakia.

Under the given conditions I became a liberal and cosmopolitan writer. Simply, I am at home everywhere in our global village.

## When did you publish your first book and how did the success follow later?

My first book of poems *Unconfirmed Reports* (1981) attracted the attention of the leading authorities in Slovak literary circles. I presented myself as a plain-spoken poet with a spontaneous manner of poetic expression and an inclination for irony directed not only at others, but also at me. This style has become typical of all my work, which in spite of its critical character has also acquired a humorous, even bizarre dimension. My manner of expression is becoming terse to the point of being aphoristic. It is thus perfectly natural that my literary interests should come to embrace aphorisms founded on a shift of meaning in the form of puns. In my work I am gradually raising some very disturbing questions and pointing to serious problems concerning the further development of humankind, while all the time widening my range of themes and styles.

I have received a number of awards for my literary and advertising work both in my own country and abroad. For example, Academy of Performing Arts Award (1981), Slovak Literary Foundation Prize (1982 and 1983), Alfred Radok Prize for Drama (1992, Prague, the Czech Republic), Federation of Young Dramatists Award (1993), Slovak Advertising Award (1995), Slovak Literary Weekly Prize (1998), Cresta International Advertising Award (1998, New York, USA), General Credit Bank Prize for Literature (1999), Slovak Writers' Society Prize (1999 and 2000), Paul Rusnak Prize for Literature (2000, Pasadena, USA), Union of Czech Writers Award (2002, Prague, the Czech Republic).

My notable poetry books: *Unconfirmed Reports* (1981), *A Mirror at the End of Summer* (1984), *Goodbye in the Plural* (1985), *Hurrah, It Burns!* (1991), *Someone Like a God* (1998), *Thy Scent Be Here* (2002), *Frequency of Your Sides* (2002), *The Theater of Life* (Bulgaria, 2003), *Chatter above the Grave* (2004), *The Reconstruction of Titanic* (the Russian Federation, 2004), *The Reconstruction of Titanic* (Macedonia, 2005), *Beauty's Own Luck* (2006), *Encrypted Autumn* (2007), *The Third State of a Man* (the Czech Republic, 2009), *A Dictionary of Foreign Dreams* (United Kingdom, 2014).

My notable books of aphorisms: A Good Betrayal Is Worth More Than Gold (1996), Satan's Place (1999), The Topless Dog... 101 Giggles (2000), Dirty Purges (2002).

My notable dramatic works: A Commonplace Comedy (co-author my wife Olga Janikova) – radio play (1986) and television play (1987), Eggshell Castle – radio play (1988), A Private Striptease – theater play (1992) and television play (1997), The School Graduation Suit – A Comic Tragedy – theater play (1992) and radio play (1992), The Trap – theater play (1995), Dangerous Comedies – three theater plays (Slovakia, 2003), (Canada, 2004), (the Russian Federation, 2006).

My notable non-fiction books: Vladimir Bahna (1986), General Lorenc – Decrypted World (2000), Interviews (on a Sense of Nation) (2002), Beyond the Science (2003), Spy Dictionary (2006), Agent from Bratislava (co-author Gabriela Holcikova) (2006), Spy Abbreviations (2006), The Spokesman for Myself (2009).

My literary works have been published in more than 30 countries, in various anthologies, literary portals and magazines.

My main publications available online: The Penniless Press (United Kingdom), BABELMATRIX: Babel Web Anthology – the Multilingual Literature Portal, Poem Hunter, Toronto Slavic Quarterly, Russian literary magazine Benefactor and World, Croatian literary magazine Kvaka, The Poets Land – Profiles of World-Class Poets.

My website is <http://pavoljanik.sk/>

I believe that the true purpose of art is to uplift humankind, inspire reverence and morality, and instill in people's hearts a true sense of beauty. Do you agree?

You are certainly right.

### Where did you study?

I studied film and television dramaturgy and scriptwriting at the Drama Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava (Slovak: Vysoka skola muzickyh umení v Bratislave, abbreviation VSMU). VSMU is a university founded on June 9, 1949. At the present time, the university consists of three faculties: Theatre Faculty, Faculty of Film and Television, Faculty of Music and Dance. VSMU is the public university-type of school and the highest accredited educational, artistic and research institution in the field of theatre, film, music and dance arts in Slovakia.

### Can you give us your work history?

During my studies at VSMU, I have worked two years as a Director for Czechoslovak Radio in Bratislava. Later I have worked as Script Editor for the Slovak Film Company (1982–1983), Secretary of the Slovak Film Council – a consultative body of the Ministry of Culture (1983–1987), Executive Secretary of the Union of Slovak Dramatic Artists (1987–1989), Editor for Film and Television – Pravda daily newspaper (1989–1990), Writer – Freelancer (1990–1992), Editor-in-Chief of Department for Culture – Koridor daily newspaper (1992–1993), Copywriter, later Creative Director for the GGK International Advertising Agency (1993–1997), Creative Director for Donar Advertising Agency (1997–1998), President of the Slovak Writers' Society (2003–2007), Secretary-General of the Slovak Writers' Society (1998–2003 and 2007–2013), Editor-in-Chief of literary weekly of the Slovak Writers' Society Literarny tyzdennik (2010–2013), Writer – Freelancer (from 2013).

While I was working at the Ministry of Culture, an outstanding Slovak poet Miroslav Valek was the Minister of Culture. It was my great experience. My wife, Olga Janikova, has received a prestige Slovak Television Award (1997) as film director for her profile of Miroslav Valek.

## What can you say about the Slovak Writers' Society?

The Slovak Writers' Society is a nationwide association, and its history goes back to 1923. It represents the most outstanding works and personalities in Slovak literature. During the period 1949 to 1989, it was renamed as the Union of Slovak Writers. The Slovak Writers' Society has regional branches in Banská Bystrica, Košice, Nitra and Zilina. The Slovak Writers' Society publishes two professional periodicals: weekly Literarný týždenník and a magazine for literature by young writers Dotyky. The Publishing House of the Slovak Writers' Society publishes more than 30 book publications per year, including original Slovak works and translations of works by foreign authors.

Many outstanding authors were Presidents of the Slovak Writers' Society, for example Ivan Krasko, Janko Jesenský, Miroslav Valek, Anton Hykisch, Peter Jaroš and Dušan Slobodník. I feel honored to be counted among them.

## What about the Union of Czech Writers?

I am a Honorary Member of the Union of Czech Writers (from 2000), when this organization was founded, so I am not only a Honorary Member, but also one of the first members of it. The Czech and Slovak Republics are two sovereign states, but they form a common area of communication, because our Slavic languages are very similar.

I was also a Member of the Editorial Board of the weekly of the Union of Czech Writers Obrysy-Kmen (2004–2014). At the present time, I am a Member of the Editorial Board of the weekly of the Union of Czech Writers Literatura – Umění – Kultura (from 2014).

The Union of Czech Writers is a national organization of professional writers of books, literary scientists, critics, reviewers, and publishers of fiction and poetry. The goal of the Union of Czech Writers is to improve conditions of all writers; to

unite writers, literary scientists, critics, translators, and publishers; and to promote writing in the Czech Republic.

**You are a member of various international writers' organizations. What does this mean to you?**

In framework of my internet communication with various foreign writers, I became a Member of the Writers Club International (from 2004), a Member of the Poetas del Mundo (from 2015), a Member of the World Poets Society (from 2016), a Director of the Writers Capital International Foundation for Slovakia and the Czech Republic (from 2016), a Chief Representative of the World Nation Writers' Union in the Slovak Republic (from 2016). Leaders of international writers' communities proposed these honorary positions to me and I accepted them as symbolical instruments of building global literary relations based on universal values of humanism and democracy.

**You are also a translator.**

I translated several books of poems by outstanding foreign authors. For example, The Earth Is a Satellite of the Moon by Nicaraguan poet Leonel Rugama (1987), All Colours Skies by Lithuanian poet Justinas Marcinkevicius (1988), It Is Finished by Greek poet Konstantinos Kavafis / Constantine P. Cavafy (1989), The Big Pocket Love by Czech poet Karel Sys(2006).

**Is there anything that connects poetry and painting? How do you see them together?**

The literature is my profession and painting is only my hobby.

**What are your plans for the future creative work?**

I have created many works already. In the future I will concentrate on publishing them around the world.

**If you could do it all over again, would you be an artist again?**

It is my destiny, fun and responsibility.

**It was a great pleasure talking to you and you are always welcome to our houses  
"Diogen pro culture"**

The pleasure is fully mine. Thanks a lot for your inspirational questions.

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