

## **INTERIM NEWSLETTER 2014-15**

For many Czechs and Slovaks living in Scotland, in 2014, there was, perhaps, additional resonance to the Scottish Independence Referendum, considering their own experience of the “Velvet Revolution” or the declaration of independence by their two countries in 1992. The centenary anniversary of the outbreak of World War 1 provided a further reminder that Czechoslovakia itself was established in 1918 as a consequence of this cataclysmic event.

Meanwhile our elected representatives and the media give ever greater prominence to immigration issues and the role of the European Community, which must be a concern for us all. All these events perhaps provide a perspective on the necessity for social, economic and political cohesion within our present day European borders and beyond.

Few individuals have contributed more to promote harmony, good will and the establishment of cultural and academic links with the Czech and Slovak Republics than Dr. Halla Beloff, the former Chair of our Committee. As a founder member, Halla has worked tirelessly and generously to further the aims of the SCSSS Fund. With her long association to the University of Edinburgh, Dr. Beloff has always provided wise counsel and invaluable liaison with the SUISS. She has hosted both Committee meetings and an annual Garden Party in her home for our visiting scholarship students, which they all have hugely appreciated. As a founder member of the Book Group, Halla has sourced numerous literary texts and critical works for despatch to particular Czech and Slovak universities. This has resulted in significant academic achievements, such as the establishment of Scots Language and Literature Departments in a number of institutions, e.g. Nitra, Olomouc and Kosice.

Halla decided to resign from the Committee after 14 years but we know that she will continue to encourage and support the work of the SCSSS Fund as modestly and generously as she has always done. Indeed, one her most recent contributions was to organize and preside over our second lecture last year on Andy Warhol, reported elsewhere in this Newsletter, along with accounts of other activities. Halla is sorely missed but the Fund Committee wish to highlight her outstanding efforts and devotion to the charity. We are certain that all members and supporters of the Fund will join us in thanking Halla for all she has done and wish her all the very best for the future.

It only remains for the Fund to once more acknowledge the continued financial and stalwart support of all members and regular supporters.

On 17 March 2015 the Fund celebrated 15 years of its existence and the Committee discussed ways of encouraging a greater involvement of the members of the Children’s Club in the Fund’s activities as the Fund members’ involvement seems to be decreasing due to the onset of age. One direction might be an increased support for the Children’s Club events; the promotion of the Czech and Slovak languages by establishing a branch of Czech and Slovak Schools Abroad so that they join the Fund itself, sit on the Committee and become involved in the activities of the Fund. The Committee therefore agreed to discuss the Fund’s future strategy at its AGM in May 2015, including the focus of the Fund’s activities in that direction and the simplification of the Fund’s name to the Scottish, Czech and Slovak Fund.

## **Information from SUISS**

Each summer Scottish Universities' International Summer School (SUISS) offers three courses in **Text and Context: British and Irish Literature from 1900 to the Present** and one course in **Creative Writing**. Our literature courses offer extensive examination of theoretical approaches to Modernism, Scottish Literature, and Contemporary Literature, while our Creative Writing course allows students to develop their personal writing portfolios. SUISS welcomes undergraduates, postgraduates, teachers, and lecturers from around the world and, in 2014, hosted students from 40 different countries.

Next year will see the launch of our **Contemporary British and Irish Theatre and Performance** course, which will coincide with the Edinburgh Festivals, and be delivered in partnership with the Scottish Playwrights' Studio.

In addition to the academic programme, SUISS offers an extensive programme of cultural and social activities. Students have the opportunity to attend events, which include talks on art, film screenings, festival shows, and ceilidh dances. A prominent feature of the programme is a series of readings from Scotland's leading contemporary writers such as David Greig, A.L. Kennedy and James Robertson to name a few.

Thanks to the generous support of the Scottish Czech Slovak Scholarship (SCSSS) Fund, SUISS is able to offer scholarships to students from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Our recent scholarship recipients, Martina Cmarova (Pavol Jozef Safarik University), Veronika Franova (Constantine the Philosopher University) and Hana Zamecknickova (Palacky University) were excellent students and worthy assets to the summer school. Hana, in particular, described her time at SUISS as "an incredible experience, which immensely helped me in my academic development. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet fellow academics from all over world, as well as a chance to learn more about Scottish people, culture, history and literature."

The summer school will run from the 6<sup>th</sup> July – 15<sup>th</sup> August 2015. Applications are invited from Czech and Slovak undergraduates and postgraduates with a good command of English, proven academic achievement, and preferably a genuine interest in Scottish culture. For further information, please visit our website at <http://www.summer-school.hss.ed.ac.uk/suiss/index.html>.

## **Student reports on the experience at SUISS 2014 in Edinburgh**

**Hana Zamečnicková**

This summer, in July 2014, I had the great privilege to attend the Scottish Universities' International Summer School in Edinburgh. For me, it was an incredible experience, which immensely helped me in my academic development. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet fellow academics from all over world, as well as a chance to learn more about Scottish people, culture, history and literature. I would like to thank all the people who made my stay in Edinburgh possible, namely my tutor from the Czech Republic, Dr Ema Jelinkova, who suggested the summer school to me and who helped me immensely during my stay in Edinburgh. A great thanks also belongs to all the people from the Scottish Czech and Slovak Summer Scholarship Fund, several of whom I had the privilege to meet in person, namely Dr Halla Beloff, who invited me for tea in her beautiful home and showed me her extensive collection of art. I would also like to thank all the people from SUISS, the directors, the tutors, all the lecturers and also all the fellow students, for such intellectually stimulating two weeks.

The programme of the summer school was very well organised indeed. Every day started with a lecture that focused on a specific author from the reading list. The first lecture started with an introduction to Scottish literature and the following lectures focused chronologically on several authors, ending with the most contemporary ones such as Alice Thompson or James Robertson. After the lecture, during the coffee break, one had the opportunity to meet the lecturer and ask some further questions. Following the lecture, there was a two-hour seminar, where the books from the reading list, which were announced well in advance, were discussed with the tutor. I was extremely lucky to have Lila as my tutor and I really enjoyed all the seminars, especially the ones where we focused on poetry, since she wrote her dissertation on Ian Hamilton Finlay. The seminar group was fairly small, which allowed everyone to be able to participate in the discussion. As all the participants had a completely different cultural and academic background, the discussion was very lively and diverse. After the seminar, there was lunch at the Library Cafeteria.

The great thing about SUISS was also the fact that all the documents, all the presentations and handouts were available online on a portal we had access to. One also had access to the University Library, which was not only helpful for the research for a presentation we were obligated to give as a part of the course requirements, but also for an individual research in terms of one's Master's thesis. As I was a non-residential student, I thought that I may feel as an outsider, yet a complete opposite proved to be true. The administrators really made sure I had a chance to attend all the cultural events and it was really easy for me to make friends and meet all the people from the course, not only since we spend a lot of time together but also because we shared similar interests.

The cultural programme during the course was beyond satisfactory, as we had a chance to visit the house of Robert Louis Stevenson, attend a reading of a Scottish author Anne Donovan, dance and try haggis during the Ceilidh and meet the people from the various funds, who provided us with the scholarships at the beautiful venue of the Old College during an Annual Reception. In addition, the end of July and the beginning of August is a wonderful time of year for a student of literature to come to Edinburgh, as there is the Edinburgh Festival as well as the Fringe, which gave us the opportunity to attend a play or an author reading. I was also very pleasantly surprised that the

weather was extremely nice and we were able to enjoy the sunny days outside and explore the beautiful places in Edinburgh as well as other cities, castles or even the Highlands.

In conclusion, I would like to thank once more all the people thanks to whom it was possible for me to attend the course and spend a wonderful time in Edinburgh. I met many new friends and discovered more about Scottish people and culture. Academically speaking, both the lectures and seminars were extremely beneficial for me in terms of my studies and they further stimulated my interest in Scottish literature.

### **Veronika Fraňová**

First of all, I would like to thank SCSSS Fund for the opportunity to take part in this wonderful summer course because without your support I wouldn't be able to come. I attended the Contemporary Literature Course of SUISS 2014 and, although it lasted only two weeks, it helped me to broaden my horizons in many aspects. I met plenty of lovely people from all around the world, I get to know many inspiring books and authors, I visited Scotland for the first time and learned more about the Scottish culture.

The course itself was very well organised and each day was carefully planned for us. We had lectures and seminars at the university every day. What is more, we could access the university library to borrow the books. Hence we could experience the student life in Scotland and we felt as students at Edinburgh University, at least for the short period of time. The one-hour lectures on the books from the reading list were given by academics who were wonderful speakers with huge enthusiasm for the books they were talking about. They were also willing to answer our questions or listen to our opinions. I especially enjoyed the very first lecture on Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* and Sarah Kane's *Blasted* with finding parallels between these two tremendous writers. Each lecture was followed by two-hour seminar. We were split into smaller groups lead by a tutor. Our tutor was very friendly and very professional at the same time. At the seminar there was enough space for our opinions, for discussions about the plot, topics, themes, characters, authors, for close readings, our interpretations and whatever we wanted to know and didn't understand. Because we all came from different cultural backgrounds, each of us had slightly different perspectives on the books. It was very inspiring for me to listen to various thoughts and different points of view arising from multicultural ambience of the seminars.

Regarding the cultural and social programme, I can't complain about anything. The SUISS team made a lot of effort so that we take advantage of the literature course and enjoy our stay in Edinburgh as much as possible. During two weeks we took part in various events. We had an amazing bus tour around Edinburgh, we participated in several discussions and workshops and one of the highlights were the readings. We could meet two marvellous Scottish writers in person – A. L. Kennedy and David Greig. They, both, were willing to answer our questions, read passages from their brilliant works, pose for some photographs and sign books. What an amazing feeling to have your own signed copy of the book!

In addition, we were lucky enough to experience the unique atmosphere which accompanies Edinburgh once a year – the festival atmosphere. During our course the Edinburgh International Festival started, so we had a chance to see several plays including *James I* where we saw part of the Scottish history on the stage performed by brilliant and professional actors.

Since I am now almost at the end of my translation studies, I really enjoyed the Translation Workshop with the Creative Scotland's Edwin Morgan Fellow. At this workshop we could take an inside look into the profession of literary translator and listen to the process of literary translating in Turkey. It was very useful and interesting for me because I would like to translate literary books in the future.

Last but not least, it was pleasure to meet the people from SCSSS Fund in Dr Beloff's beautiful house, to talk with you in person about your work and the fund as well. It is very kind of you that you try to preserve the tradition of developing relations between our cultures and provide people from Slovakia and Czech republic with this indescribably wonderful experience. Moreover, I would like to thank Dr Beloff for her help with the books. I am very grateful and I will never forget that you enabled me this visit. Although I spent in Edinburgh only two weeks, I will benefit from this short-term stay my whole life. And I will definitely translate some of the books I got to know during the course so I can bring a part of Scotland into Slovakia.

## **Czech and Slovak Children's Club News by Veronika Jones**

2014 has been yet another year filled with fun and activities for the children of Czech and Slovak expats in Scotland's capital. The Czech and Slovak Children's Club has once again seen a wide variety of different events providing a mixture of creativity and other forms of fun and expression. While everyone recovered from the previous year's festivities, the first quarter of the year was spent getting in useful finger-painting and singing practice together in preparation for some of the year's bigger events...

Easter was spent with the children decorating plastic eggs, creating Easter cards and drawing Easter-themed pictures with crayons; while Mother's Day was spent creating beautiful crepe paper flowers (among other things).

This year saw an early celebration of International Children's Day. A split of outdoor and indoor activities made for a very exciting day: Outdoors we had sack races, scooter races, and tin can target ranges; while indoors we had our very first bouncy castle along with some quieter activities such as Czech and Slovak poetry recitals and puzzle-solving games to allow those of us who were a little overexcited to catch our breath.

Some of us have also met at a garden party organised by the SCSSS Fund at the beginning of June. Fortunately, the weather was mostly un-Scottish until towards the end, allowing for a very enjoyable time to be had by all. The last meeting before the summer holiday break took place at our usual venue at St. Stephen's Comely Bank Church a couple of weeks later.

Upon returning from the summer break in September, the children's activities took on a more autumnal feel. A few weeks later brought one of the events of the year: Halloween. The Czech and Slovak Children's Club is mostly about learning Czech and Slovak traditions; however Halloween is a perfect opportunity for children to learn about a tradition less familiar to most of their parents. Kids came dressed in various costumes and were able to spend time together dancing, singing, making origami bats and cats, and decorating small pumpkins with hair and funny eyes.

St. Nicholas Day has always been the biggest event of the Czech and Slovak Children's Club and this year was no exception. Around 100 children attended with their families, all excited to once again see St. Nicholas and his companions – the Angel and the Devil – and hope that he would think they've been good enough to deserve a treat or three. Of course treats have to be earned, so the children first needed to impress St. Nicholas with their singing, and with the gingerbread men they had decorated. He was duly impressed and gave out goody bags to all the children. For those of us too naughty to receive free treats, there was always the chance of winning them in the club's first ever tombola. Some excellent prizes – such as a four-course Sunday brunch for 2 people at Hotel Du Vin, family ticket to the Scotch Whisky Experience, a Christmas Advent wreath as well as various sweets and other goodies – were up for grabs, and grabbed they were. We were all pleased to welcome the Honorary Consul General of the Czech Republic to this year's event. He gave a wonderful speech and drew the tickets for the tombola. All-in-all no-one went home empty handed (unless they were both naughty *and* unlucky).

It's been a great 2014, and I'm certain we can all greatly look forward to 2015.

## **Summary of Events 2014**

Thanks to all who contributed to, participated in and/or attended our 2014 Programme. We look forward to seeing you again throughout 2015.

14 February 2014 – **Annual Lecture- Down the Cellar, The Architectural Setting as an Embodied Topography of the Imagination in the Films of Jan Svankmajer** by Dr. Dagmar Motycka Weston. This event held at the University of Edinburgh raised £135 for the Fund. Thank you Dagmar.

24 May 2014 – **International Children’s Day** held at St Steven’s Church, Comely Bank, which was well attended and much enjoyed by the children and parents alike. The Fund contributed £100 towards its costs.

1 June 2014 - **Annual AGM & Garden Party** St Alban’s Road

Grateful thanks to Tony and Olga Franks for once more hosting this event and all who helped with catering, drinks and for donating tombola prizes.

£733 raised on a wonderful sunny Sunday afternoon! Grateful thanks to numerous donors of prizes and refreshments - especially Ken Duncan of Inveralmond Brewery, Perth and Miriam Spiers of Alliance Wine.

7/8 June 2014 – **Meadows Festival** - Our stall raised £616.50 - with plants selling particularly well.

July 2014 – **Three students** from the Czech and Slovak Republics attended a two week course at SUISS at a cost of £2400 – Martina Cmarova, Hana Zamecnikova and Veronika Franova, see two reports above.

13 November 2014 – **2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Lecture, Andy Warhol – From A To Be And Back Again** by Dr Glyn Davies, which raised £90. Grateful thanks to Halla Beloff for organising it.

29 November 2014 - **St Nicholas Party for the Children’s Club**. Over 200 children and parents attended. The Fund contributed £200 to provide Christmas gifts and refreshments for Czech and Slovak youngsters.

The Committee apologises for the non-appearance of our Annual Christmas and New Year Newsletter for 2014 for personal and technical reasons and the provisional disappearance of our website, February-April. It is now being updated.

We trust, this Bulletin will, for now, provide members and friends with news of the Fund’s activities and future direction.