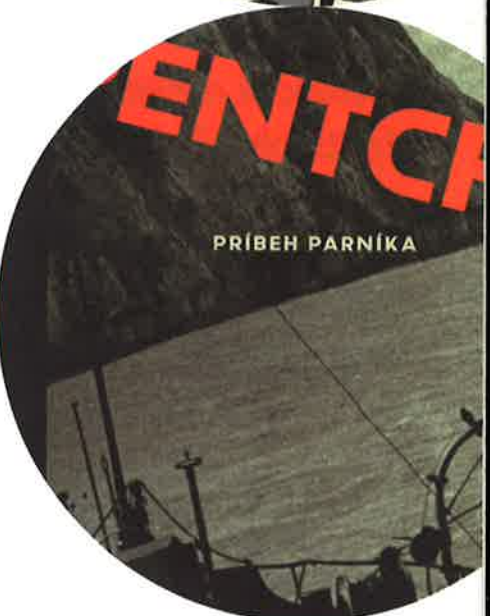
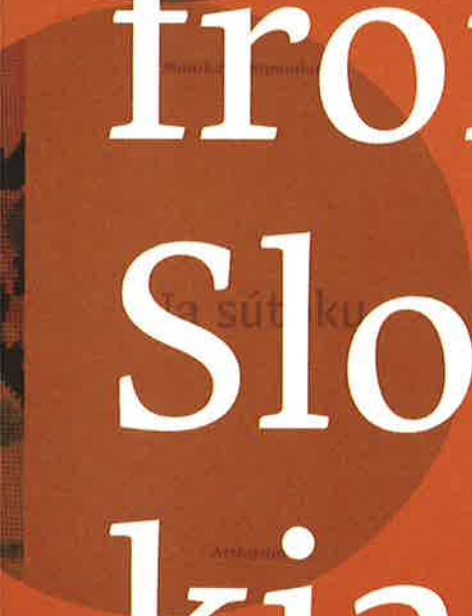
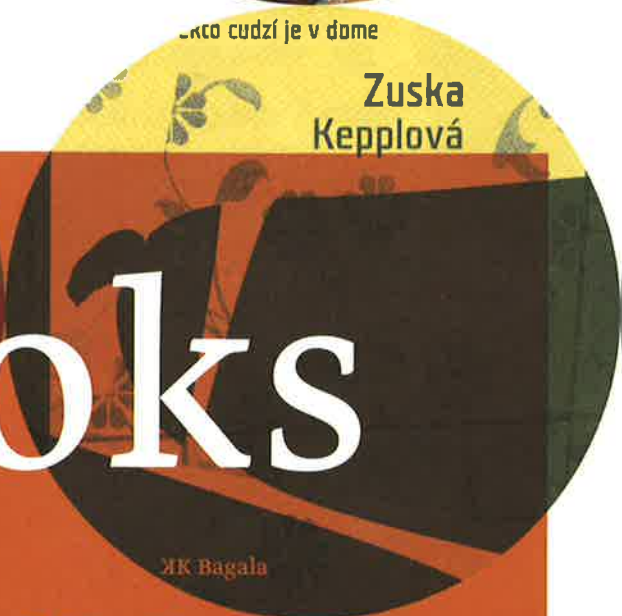
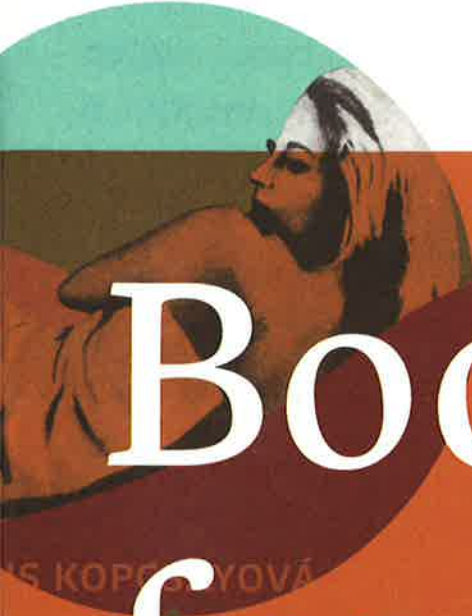
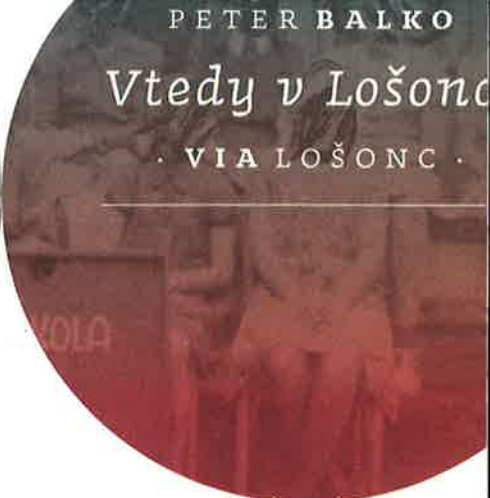


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Books from Slova- kia 2016

Jaro Rihák

Pentcho. The Story of a Steamboat

A story about five hundred people, mostly young Jews, sailing down the Danube and across the sea on a river steamboat in 1940 in an attempt to reach Palestine. The author has drawn on the narratives of passengers on the boat. It is a historical story, but it happens in every period. Yesterday to them, today to me, tomorrow to you.

The date is 1940. If someone decides to sail 1 868 kilometres from Bratislava to the mouth of the Danube, on a rusty river steamboat written off as scrap, it is a long voyage. If someone wants to sail on a Danube steamboat from the mouth of the Danube another 2 400 kilometres on the Black Sea, in order to cross the Mediterranean to Haifa, that takes courage. And in this way four hundred people crowded onto the little fifty-metre steamboat Pentcho, which set out from Bratislava's Winter Port. A few days later it took on board a further hundred prisoners from the Dachau concentration camp who wanted to reach what was then British Palestine. It was wartime and the only route still open to them was a voyage along the international river, the Danube. All that was necessary was a visa to Paraguay, not to get off the boat onto the river bank, to go hungry and to trust the one-legged captain. It was one of the most daring journeys ever made in the history of sailing. An almost-forgotten story, written according to the authentic accounts of the participants. Europe had turned her back on them and they turned their backs on her. Nowadays the story of the voyage takes on quite new dimensions.

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EXCERPT: TRANSLATED BY JULIA AND PETER SHERWOOD

– May I point out, Captain, that tomorrow is the beginning of a major Jewish holiday, Yom Kippur? You must stop working... People ought to start getting ready.

Markeyevich is lost for words. Yes, this is the same man who joked about the mine. The Captain grows serious and turns to Citron.

– Mr Citron, if this man isn't down on the lower deck where he belongs within three seconds I'll have him locked up in the engine room and tied to a hot boiler! Do you want to survive? You can celebrate your holiday if we survive. Is that clear?

Despite his active protestations the men lead the teacher down to the men's deck. Ali stands on the captain's bridge, surveying the sea through a pair of binoculars. He spots something and shouts.

– Land ahoy! Captain! An island!

Exactly where the Captain predicted it a small strip of distant land has appeared. Just at that moment the men finish erecting the mast, the women are done sewing. The old Singer machine has gone quiet. Greta, Lila and the young Polish women bring the sails.

– Here are the sails, Captain!

Markeyevich picks the men to be in charge of the jib and the mainsail. He shows them how to hold the towlines and where to tie the rope. He attaches a small strip of canvas to a steel cable. The scrap of fabric flutters in the wind. The wind direction is favourable. Everyone on board watches the Captain intently.

– Unfurl the sails! Steering wheel to southwest!

The Captain watches the sails in suspense. They are too small for the iron steamboat but the wind has picked up in the meantime, the sails unfurl slowly, and Pentcho begins to move. Professor Haas hums an Italian song he has recently learned, whose lyrics speak of sailors and sails on the horizon "that are just an illusion". Karol joins in, Berliner goes to fetch his fiddle and soon the others join in singing the chorus.

Karchi bends over the prow and sees the steamboat slowly parting the waves. He turns around and shouts happily, so the whole boat can hear.

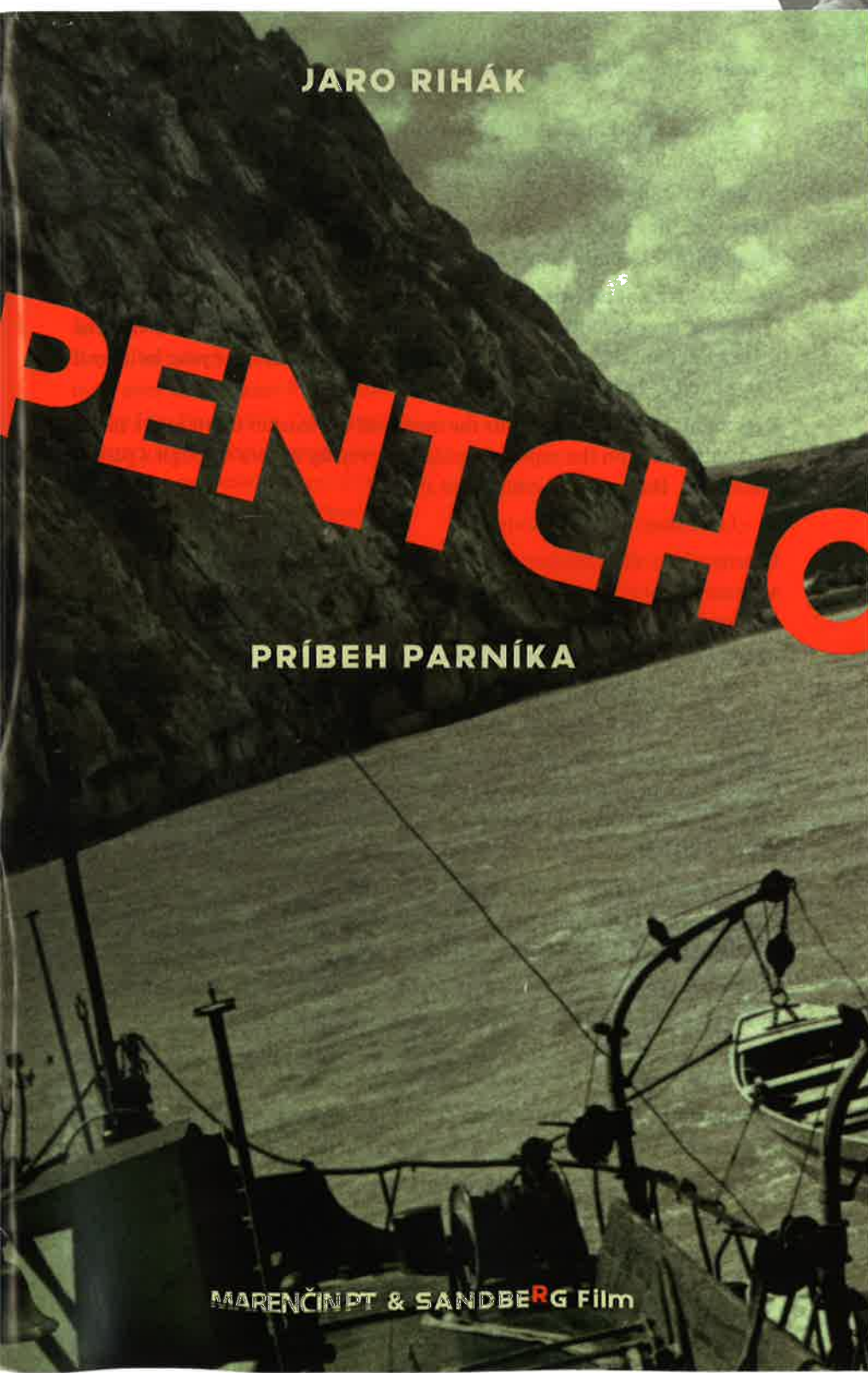
– We're sailing! We're a sailing boat...

"October 8th. Everyone has been talking about the holy day of Yom Kippur. My Mum has been looking forward to it, too. Nobody knew where and how we would celebrate it. Now we know. On the island!"

“The story touches me personally. It touches me just as much as the stories of those who are at this moment rocking on the waves of the Mediterranean, dying, going hungry and dreaming of Europe, in precisely the same way as the heroes of the Pentcho steamboat once dreamed.”



PHOTO (C) ADAM RIHÁK



Jaro Rihák
Pentcho. Príbeh parníka

Published by:
Marenčin PT, Bratislava, 2015, 330 p.
Sandberg Film, Bratislava, 2015

ISBN:978-80-8114-495-0



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Jaro Rihák (1951)

A graduate in directing from Prague’s Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (DAMU), he is the author of documentary and fiction films for television, as well as radio plays. *Pentcho. Príbeh parníka* (Pentcho. The Story of a Steamboat) was originally written as the screenplay for a film, *Na druhú stranu*, for which the author won the main prize of the Czech RWE & Barrandov Studio Film Foundation. Coproduction partners are now being sought for its making. An extended version of the screenplay was published in book form and this reached the final round of the prestigious literary prize Anasoft Litera 2016. The author lives in Devín, a suburb of Bratislava, situated on the 1880th kilometre of the River Danube.



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This publication has been released with financial assistance of Transbook.

Transbook Project is a European initiative to promote the digital transition and internationalisation of the children's publishing industry. Transbook is co-financed by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union and operated by seven European partners from the children's publishing industry.

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Books from Slovakia 2016

© Centre for Information on Literature, 2016
Translations © Jonathan Gresty, John Minahane,
Julia and Peter Sherwood, Heather Trebatická, 2016.
Graphic Design and Layout © Matúš Lelovský, 2016
English language supervision Adrian Brown
Printed in Slovakia by Tlačiareň P + M, Turany.

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