

Anyone who has ever crawled from pub to pub in Prague – or anyone who wants to – should read this utterly beguiling novel of uproarious surfaces and melancholy depths. It will give you a score of sound reasons why weak-willed human creatures (specifically, human males) should find better things to do with their brief allotted span than semi-drunkenly ogling waitresses, chewing over the aerodynamics of Second World War fighters (now, the piston Corsairs, "those were beautiful planes...") or swapping recipes for the world's worst cocktails (add rum to mint liqueur and Fernet and "it's called Journey into Prehistory"). Equally, this tragi-comic cross between a Beckett double-act and an inter-generational take on *The Likely Lads* will explain why, at least in a town with a past like Prague's, such reform feels light years away. Welcome to "A total circus." "But a merry one."

From Hasek to Hrabal (both of whose ghosts prop up the bar here), Czech heretics have given satirical heft to the profane digressions of Bohemian boozers. Emil Hakl, a leading figure on Prague's post-Soviet literary scene, belongs in their ironic company. His brimming glass of bitter gags lets us sip six decades of disaster.

Early-forties Honza Benes takes his retired-biologist father, now 71, on a chatty ramble through city parks and suburbs (Hakl's real name is Benes). This being Prague, the pair never stray far from a Staropramen with brandy chaser. Along their zigzagging route, they mull over family and political memories, the mysteries of women and the natural world, and that truly horrible thing that old Kukacka who drives the No.22 tram once did.

The father-son dialogue, beautifully caught by Marek Tomin's dancing translation, is a delight. Hakl trusts his readers to complete the emotional jigsaw, and spell out the heartbreak behind the hedonism. Lust and drink aside, history frames that heartbreak: the atrocities of wartime Croatia, where Benes senior grew up; the ruin of a "bourgeois" family after the Communist coup; the edgy aftermath of the Soviet invasion in 1968, when "everyone was trying to play both sides".

Hakl makes the "theatrical dimensions" of his tipsy and gossipy Prague the stage of merry fools. Yet we finish with a double espresso and a sober longing for the spouse and home which might – just might – offer a refuge when history barges back into the bar.

*Boyd Tonkin, Independent*

To my mind Emil Hakl is one of the more interesting Czech writers today. Even though his reality is firmly rooted in Czech reality, I think he would also appeal to an international readership as his core themes are those that would resonate with anyone.

*Jan Čulík, Britské listy*

This virile sentimentality is quite exceptional in contemporary art and is ultimately the real core of Hakl's writing, though at first glance it might seem that this core has been fragmented into anecdotes.

*Jiří Peňás, Týden*

*Of Kids & Parents* displays Hakl's skill in creating a purely personal depiction of the world around him, stemming the flow of time and capturing great dramas in the miniature of a weary mundanity replete with every shade of emotion.

*Právo*