

What interests me now is the future!

Martin Vopěnka about his novel *Nová planeta* (*New Planet*) and poetry

I do not want to dwell on the past. There was a time when I used to think I did, that I would write about the time around the Holocaust and the advance of Communism through stories about my Jewish ancestors. But probably not any more.

When it comes to the present, I sometimes think it needs no assistance. We see a reality show on the news every day, full of incredible, dramatic, heart rendering stories from around the world.

What interests me now is the future – of Europe, civilisation and humanity – near and distant. The future is open to intellectual deliberation as well as to great literary stories.

I have just spent two years on one. It entertained me, moved me and excited me. I loved my heroes, feared for them and suffered with them.

What is *New Planet* about? It is mainly about the greatest betrayal that can happen to anyone in life: betrayal by those one trusts the most. Internally, I put my son in the role of the victim, which made the story all the more powerful for me.

New Planet is also about the future. It presents, perhaps to an extreme, two parallel scenarios. The New Planet civilisation is not found somewhere far away in the universe; it is still confined to planet Earth. The technological elite inhabit it. Once upon a time they established a new society behind an impenetrable wall to hide from all catastrophes and crises. They created a self-reliant community of tens of thousands of people living in an enclosed space, continuing with research and dreaming of leaving for a host planet. In order for such a community to sustain itself, it had to create a strong ideology of superiority. According to it, nothing else exists on planet Earth outside the impenetrable spatiotemporal border that surrounds New Planet. From the point of view of this ideology, the civilisation that calls itself New Planet has already left Earth. With the flawless virtualisation of the delineated spaces, is the certainty of liberty lost? Are the inhabitants of New Planet free or are they the victims of a gigantic manipulation scheme?

And then there still is one other civilisation living on Earth, or more precisely only what has been left of it after hundreds of years. A wounded Daniel has found himself in this other world because of the mentioned betrayal. Civilisation behind the wall has long laid in ruins and has lost all its technological

capabilities. That is something that can easily happen, because today the bearer of such knowledge and skill is no longer an individual or even a group of individuals. In the event of truly great crash, there would be nobody to revive or recover all accumulated knowledge. In a way, these two civilisations truly do not exist in the same time and space. One is eight hundred years more advanced than the present and the other is eight hundred years behind.

Only one person has been chosen to live in both worlds: unhappy and wounded Daniel. Until the age of twelve he lived in the first world; he then fought for survival, matured, fell in love and then experienced his fate as the chosen one in the other.

His fate is similar to the fate of the biblical Joseph, who was also once betrayed by his brothers and forced to live in a new civilisation. The biblical story in a way repeats itself in the distant future. And that is why there is also a ray of hope.

I have finished writing the story, unfortunately. I say unfortunately because at this time I do not foresee another one that could equal its stature. Or maybe I am too exhausted: *New Planet* is over 700 pages long. Now that I do not have to think on a daily basis about moving the story forward, I have more time for poetry. Until now I had only written poems occasionally – in those rare moments that they came to me by themselves. It was always a great joy, a feeling of being given a great gift. Now those feelings are becoming ever more frequent. They allow me to cross the frontier between being and not being directly. Their basic theme is despair. Fear of not being able to hold back time. The fear of the end; the eternal nothingness after death. There is, however, something beautiful about such fear. As if life only achieves repletion in it.

Martin Vopěnka

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