

# KAREL ČAPEK 130



Městská  
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Praha 10

# KAREL ČAPEK 130

## OUTDOOR EXHIBITION



KAREL ČAPEK 130  
BRINGS THE WRITER,  
JOURNALIST,  
PLAYWRIGHT AND  
CITIZEN KAREL ČAPEK  
BACK TO THE STREETS  
OF PRAGUE 10  
AFTER MORE THAN  
EIGHTY YEARS



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Praha 10

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The individual panels are grouped by theme, but do not lose sight of the correct chronology.

They guide us through the region where the three Čapek children spent their childhood, where their family lived, and what was going on in the world at the time they were born.

They show how important it was for Karel Čapek to study and pick up experience in other European countries and to establish contact with the young generation of artists in Prague.

However, just as the avant-garde was taking flight, its hopes were grounded for several years by the Great War, during which many talented artists were dispatched to the front and the rest had trouble making a living or finding employment.

As newly independent Czechoslovakia was being built after the war, it was a land of opportunity. Karel Čapek embarked on a career as a journalist and enjoyed his first great success as a playwright. As his finances improved, he could afford to build a new home in what was then a suburb of Prague.

The exhibition presents period photographs – taken by Čapek himself – of the house's interior and garden. Besides showing us how the house was furnished, they hint at the writer's many interests and hobbies and give us an insight into the relationship he had with the local area.

Over the years, Karel Čapek's house hosted many get-togethers with friends, the famous Friday Men, artists and important figures from home and abroad. The interior of the house changed most noticeably after the writer's long-time partner, the actress Olga Scheinpflugová, became his wife and moved in.

In the end, Karel Čapek died of pneumonia here after a short period of connubial bliss and a tremendous fight to preserve the democratic state in the dark times of the Second Republic.

The exhibition presents what Karel Čapek, as a citizen, thought of public and political life at the time. His views are still relevant today.

We also explain the work that is being done to restore Čapek's house so that it can soon be opened to the public as a museum and memorial.

The exhibition includes numerous contemporary views of places that are linked to the writer's life and may inspire you to visit them yourselves by journeying through Slovakia in the footsteps of the famous brothers.

# CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPE

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Malé Svatoňovice.



Malé Svatoňovice in north-eastern Bohemia, period view



Birthplace of Karel Čapek, now the Brothers Čapek Museum

Malé Svatoňovice, the place of my birth, is known for its Madonna, who may not be as powerful as the one in Wambierzyce, but is miraculous all the same. My mother would offer her breasts made of wax, praying for me to have strong lungs. However, these waxy chests were always fashioned as a woman's bosom, which gave me the bizarre impression that we boys were bereft of lungs and instilled in me the vain expectation that mine would grow as a result of my mother's prayers. The landscape is dotted with the farmsteads where peasant rebels would once have been born, as in Rtyň. Today, though, industry abounds, with miles of towels and duck cloth from Úpice unfurling into the world...

Karel Čapek



Interior of the chapel housing a miraculous spring at the Church of the Virgin Mary

## 1890

On 26 July 1855, Antonín Čapek was born in Zernov into the family of a farmer, Josef Čapek, and his wife Františka. From 1869 to 1876, he attended the grammar school in Hradec Králové, where he passed his examinations with distinction. He then went on to study medicine at Charles-Ferdinand University in Prague from 1876 to 1881. In 1883, he made his way to Malé Svatoňovice and started working as a doctor for the local mines and spas. In 1884, he married Božena Novotná, the eighteen-year-old daughter of the Hronov merchant and miller Karel Novotný and his wife Helena, née Holčebchrová, from Velký Dvůr. The wedding took place in Hronov on 6 November. The Čapeks had a daughter, Helena, on 26 January 1886, and a son, Josef, on 23 March 1887. Both were born in Hronov. Their youngest son, Karel, was born in Malé Svatoňovice on 9 January 1890.



Dr. Antonín Čapek (1855-1928) - father



Božena Čápková with her children (from left) Josef, Karel, Helena, probably 1891



Karel Čapek's baptism certificate

Our mother was very a sprightly and sensitive being who reacted to everything intensely and passionately. She was surprisingly well-read despite living deep in the countryside, she managed to keep up with modern literature. She would quote Antonín Šova to us and, later, she had the addressness to adapt fluidly to the literary interests of us growing children... She and our father kindled in us an early interest in literature. They built up a very large library at home, amassing many of the books published by Otto, Topič and Laichr and subscribing to magazines. Our mother was more knowledgeable on all of this than our very busy father, though he was a very avid reader whenever he could steal a free moment or two. In her younger days, she had been a pretty, apple-cheeked woman with fine black hair, which soon greyed. Right up until her dotage, when she was frequently in poor health, her eyes would continue to twinkle black. They conveyed her unrest, the constant movement of an eruptive, passionate, impulsive, and intense spirit.

The Brothers Čapek



Božena Čápková, née Novotná (1866-1924) -mother

## 1907

After his successful stint in Malé Svatoňovice, Dr Antonín Čapek decided to transfer his medical practice to nearby Úpice, which was then rapidly developing into a centre of the textile industry. In the summer of 1889, he started building a house here, which was ready for the family to move in just a year later. He continued to practise as a GP in Úpice until he fell ill in 1907.



Period view of Úpice, end of the 19th century



Period view of Úpice, end of the 19th century



Some of the documentation for the family's new house in Úpice



The Čapek family home in Úpice, where they lived from 1890 to 1907

Grandma positively sparkled with folksy sentimentality and folksy humour and was always ready with a saying, a soubriquet or a song. She would even make up the words herself when she wanted to describe something more emphatically. Her lively folksy wit and wisdom was always a great help to her, even in the darkest hours of her life...

In later years, our grandmother's strong and beautiful personality fundamentally and heavily influenced Karel Čapek's rich, earthy, textured and yet simple writing. Karel Čapek's formidable grasp of formal Czech was steeped in high literary elegance and discipline as much as in folksy fleshiness and the unpretentiousness of his narrative expression.

Josef Čapek



From left: Karel, Helena and Josef Čapek, circa 1888



The Čapek family, sitting (from left): Helena Novotná (grandmother), Dr Antonín Čapek (father), Božena Čápková (mother), standing: Josef and Helena, circa 1902

**To be a labourer**

The boy who yearned to be an organ-grinder, a fireman, a captain or an explorer was a poor learner, and they decided that nothing would become of him. So they put him to work in a factory. He forged hook nails, counted and assembled machines, wove endless strips of napkins and towels, and, stood over miles of military burlap destined for China, his longing for nature eventually got the better of him and he escaped from the factory to become a painter, a decision that has not at all paid off.

**To be an anarchist**

The boy with a penchant for the quiet life was very fond of crafts, but because he was a good learner, they enrolled him for academic studies, where he soon fell in love, wrote verse under his desk, fought teachers and the law, and, his principles undermined after falling in with a very non-murderous gang of anarchists, was forced to leave his unappreciative small-town grammar school.

The Brothers Čapek



Brothers Karel and Josef Čapek

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# SCHOOLDAYS

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## 1895



Main square (Ghisl Square, now Hus Square) in Hradec Králové, where Karel Čapek lived in the house at number 17 (second from the right) with his grandmother Helena Novotná while he was a grammar school student

Karel started attending the Volksschule in Úpice on 16 September 1895. In 1901, he moved on to the first form at the Bürgerschule. In the same year, he began studying at the classical grammar school in Hradec Králové, where he lived with his grandmother Helena Novotná in a sublet. He then left Hradec in 1905 and headed for Brno, where his sister Helena and her husband lived, and studied at the First Czech State Grammar School for two years. He subsequently completed his secondary education by passing his school-leaving examinations at the Academic Grammar School in Prague in 1909.



The building of the former Academic Grammar School in Prague, where Karel Čapek graduated in 1909



Photograph of Karel Čapek during his grammar school days

*I attended three grammar schools, each with its own very specific tradition. I met accomplished teachers there who managed to infuse even Greek morphology or algebra with something that captivated us boys or at least earned our respect. I met spiritless teachers who were just as bored by their subject as we were, and for whom the sole purpose of teaching was to dole out marks. And, finally, there was every boy's nightmare, the nitpickers and the pedants, skilled at putting us off their subjects almost for life.*

Karel Čapek

## 1907



House No. 11 (middle) in Říčnská Street, Kampa, where the Čapek family moved to from Úpice in 1907

*The brothers Josef and Karel Čapek began their literary career by writing joint works of both fiction and art criticism. This joint creative stage began in late 1907 and was made possible by the family's relocation to Prague. Josef had already been studying at the School of Applied Arts here since the autumn of 1904. The brothers' parents moved to Prague from Úpice in July 1907, where they were joined by Karel, who had been studying at grammar school in Brno. The early stage of the two brothers' joint writing ended in 1912, after they yielded to a final burst of inspiration from their stay in Paris in the spring of 1911 and their subsequent joint involvement in the creative and organisational work of the emerging Czech Cubist avant-garde (the Group of Fine Artists).*

Jiří Opelík



Letter of matriculation entitling Karel Čapek to study at the Faculty of Arts, Charles Ferdinand University, 1909

## 1910



(From left) František Langer and Karel Čapek in Berlin, 1910

*I grabbed my suitcase and set off in search of the university. There it was, precisely where the city map – an exercise in German meticulousness – had said it would be. I checked over old Humboldt, who was perched in front of the university, and went inside. I found there the object of my quest: a large board on which cards advertising the addresses of landlords had been pinned. I settled on a "gentleman's room with breakfast" for ten marks in Linienstrasse. And off we went, my case and I, to look for that street. We found an extremely long road that was pleasing to us, for it seemed quiet and yet jolly, with a coloured lantern – red, green, blue, or yellow – suspended from each house.*

Karel Čapek



Letter of matriculation entitling Karel Čapek to study at the Faculty of Arts, Berlin University, in the 1910-11 winter semester



Humboldt University, Berlin

## 1911

*Paris was more important than Berlin for my development, and incomparably so, because in Berlin I frequented the university and in Paris every which type of bar.*

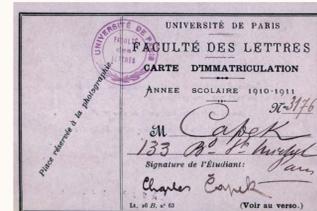
Karel Čapek



The Čapek brothers during a study visit to Paris, 1911



Paris, period postcard



Karel Čapek's letter of matriculation from the Sorbonne, Paris, for the 1910-11 summer semester

*The artists of Čapek's generation were the unmistakable products of the mobility made possible by Austrian modernisation. Most came from fairly modest backgrounds, only one or two generations removed from the land, and most were newcomers to Prague rather than elite members of an entrenched urban bourgeoisie. The trajectory of Josef and Karel Čapek is typical. Raised in the small provincial town of Úpice, their father, a successful doctor, was the son of peasant farmers and the first in his family to receive a higher education. When the Čapek family moved to Prague in 1907, Karel and Josef quickly fell in with a circle of like-minded, ambitious young men determined to make their mark on Czech culture. Their confidence in their ability to remake their culture is one of their most striking attributes. And they never doubted for a moment that they were entitled to do so.*

Thomas Ort



Members of the Group of Fine Artists (from bottom left): František Langer, Jan Thor, Emil Filib, (middle): Josef Čuřík, Vilém Dvořák, Vlastislav Hofman, Pávek Janák, (top): Vincenc Beneš, Otto Cutfreund, Josef Čapek, Josef Čechoci, Karel Čapek



Friends from the Union Café on a trip to Troja (from left): Antonín Matějček, Václav Všem Šech, František Langer, Vlastislav Hofman, Josef Čuřík, Josef Čapek, Karel Čapek



Facade of the Union Café (which no longer exists) in Paris, where the Čapek brothers would meet up with other members of the young artistic society



The Čapek brothers in Říčnská Street

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# LOVES

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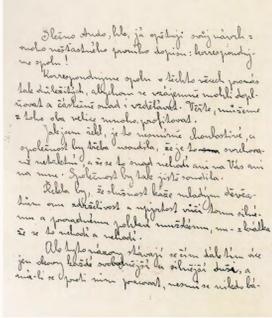
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## ANIELKA

As a fourth-form student at the grammar school in Hradec Králové, Karel Čapek fell in love with his fellow student Anna Nepeřená (Anielka).



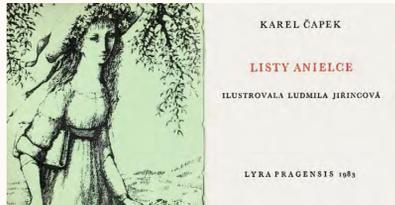
Hradec Králové, Velké náměstí (Great Square) with grammar school in the former Jesuit college (the building on the right next to the church), where Karel Čapek studied in 1901-1905



Letter from Karel Čapek to Anna Nepeřená, 1905



Anna (Anielka) Nepeřená (right)



First book edition of Čapek's letters to Anna Nepeřená, 1983

## MINKA



Hermína (Minka) Bergerová, the daughter of a confectioner from Prague, was Čapek's love from his dancing lessons (1907-1908)

Hermína Bergerová

## LIBUŠE



Karel Čapek met Libuše Solpérová, from Jindřichův Hradec, during the holidays of 1909 when he was in Lázně sv. Kateřina, a spa resort near Počátky.

Libuše Solpérová

## OLGA



Scheinpflugová and Čapek on holiday in the Giant Mountains, 1921



Svanda Theatre in Prague, where Olga Scheinpflugová began her acting career

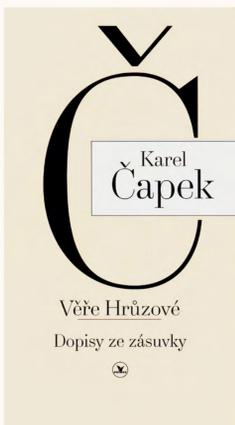
In the summer of 1920, Karel Čapek became acquainted with Olga Scheinpflugová (1902-68), an actress from the Svanda Theatre and the daughter of his fellow journalist Karel Scheinpflug. In the same year, he met student Věra Hružová (1901-79), from Brno, in Anna Lauermannová's literary salon. Starting in mid-1922, Čapek romanced both girls. In the spring of 1923, his personal crisis reached a head and he decided to leave for Italy. On his return in the summer of the same year, he discovered that Věra Hružová was betrothed to businessman Josef Skoupi. Karel Čapek continued his relationship with Olga Scheinpflugová and after fifteen years together they got married. It was while on holiday together in the Alps that they decided on marriage, and the wedding itself was held on 26 August 1935 at Vinohrady Town Hall in Prague. They were husband and wife until Čapek's death three years later. Olga outlived Karel by thirty years and never remarried.



Čapek would visit Olga Scheinpflugová in Thurbová Street, where she was living at the time, after her performance

Ola, you'll be someone one day; you are of such precious matter that it makes me suffer to see hands of clouds and loveless of those which are now lamping you along the misty path interfering with it. Ola, you must allow me to work on you and with you; you are young, and I am afraid that you will be shaped by those who neither love you nor even understand you. You have to grow; you have to be phenomenal. Ola, I love you too much; your presence is not enough for me, I want and have to impress myself deep into your future. As of today, Olga, I will talk to you only of this lasting "word". I want to be the staircase you ascend. This is my lot.  
5 December 1926

## VĚRA



Book edition of Čapek's correspondence to Věra Hružová

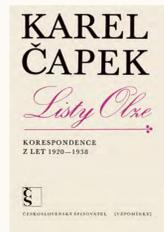


The character of the Princess in Čapek's novel Krakatit was modelled on Věra Hružová

Věra, there is only one thing in life of value: freedom. And if love and freedom were to be mutually exclusive, I choose freedom. So it is with unapologetic vigour I say to you, Ola - perhaps out of a lack of imprudent distractions - have a desire to love: better dark wings than shackles. You know, a "serious" love is one that binds; love must float freely, not be chained down.  
26 June 1922



Olga Scheinpflugová in a photograph taken by Karel Čapek, late 1920s



Collection of Čapek's letters to Scheinpflugová from 1920-1938

Dear Olinka, the main thing for me is to get to see you again soon. Do everything you can to make it as soon as possible. I look to the future with ease, it will work, the picture will not be as bad as emotional excitement paints it to be; and, as for the two of us, I yearn for us to be close together and live more for each other than before. I send you many of the most ardent of kisses. Your K.  
24 October 1928

# WAR AND WORK

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Needless to say, it was the younger generation that bore the brunt of the war... It was a homeless life in limbo; our lives weren't worth a farthing... it was simply an abandoned generation, for which there was no place out back; it was not worth anyone's while to employ a young man. I think that few generations have first-hand experience of as much disregard and selfishness, cowardice, deprivation and humiliation as this one... This naked impotence was worse than the crude pressure of war...

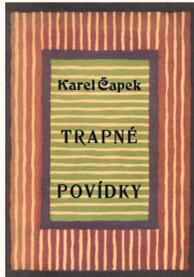
Karel Čapek

He sought solace by at least trying to put together a collective anthology of French poetry, and he himself would grapple with the translation for days and nights, feeling, rather mystically, that in this way he was somehow helping those who were on the Somme and near Verdun. And when Wilson gave Germany an ultimatum, the young intellectual published a book on Anglo-American pragmatism; friends, it was not the "philosophy of a generation", it was politics; it was an intellectual alliance with Wilson's America; it was, in a way, a smidgen of what we call "local resistance".

Karel Čapek, Pritomnost 1932



Karel Čapek's first solo book was published in 1917



Trapné povídky (Painful Tales), a collection of prose in which the author dwells on the meaning of human existence, was first published in 1920



During the war, Čapek translated modern French poetry, and the resulting book was first published in 1920

1917



Chyše Chateau, near Karlův Vary

Count Lažanský's chateau in Chyše, where Karel Čapek stayed from April to September 1917 as the tutor of the count's son Prokop. He was there when the ammunition factory in Bolevec exploded, a source of inspiration for his novel entitled Krakatit.



Period photograph of explosion



The Lidové noviny newsroom in Národní třída, Prague

After the revolution of 1918, Lidové noviny relocated to Prague from Brno, where it had already laid the foundations that would enable it to grow into the newspaper of the Czech liberal intelligentsia. One of ways it did this was to associate with many good young authors, so that it was constantly cloaked in a kind of literary and artistic aura. It also enabled many future writers to make a living. It was, we might say, a spawning ground for writers...

František Langer



Editor's desk used by Čapek

Karel Čapek worked for Lidové noviny in 1921-28



In October 1917, Čapek joined Národní listy as an editor

I think of myself as a journalist. I don't do it as a side job; I take it as seriously as literature. I wish all writers had studied journalism, as this would have taught them to take an interest in everything. In literature, it anguishes me no end that the author is usually confined to his own closed world. A writer should inhabit a world that belongs to everyone. Journalism, too, is an exercise in universality. A journalist must go after everything and be attentive to the whole world, not just a certain field.

Karel Čapek, 22 October 1937



Nebojsa, a magazine edited by Josef Čapek in 1918-20 and to which Karel contributed under the pseudonym Plocek



Karel Čapek's press card

I once tried to write a short story as a drama, and I can only blame the late old František Khol for coaxing it out of me and giving it a run. That story is called The Outlaw. So it was that I inadvertently became a dramatist, which had other consequences, such as the fact that Jaroslav Kvapil began persuading me to join Vinohrady Theatre as a literary editor. Knowing I was entirely unsuited to the role, it seemed an adventure to me, and that was the only thing that induced me to make a stab at it.

Karel Čapek



In 1921-1923, Karel Čapek was the literary editor at the Royal Vinohrady Municipal Theatre, pictured with actor Hugo Haas (left)



The National Theatre staged the premiere of Čapek's successful comedy The Outlaw in March 1920

He became a journalist after working as a tutor and librarian. At first, working for the newspapers was a job for him, but over time it became a calling. As he matured, Karel Čapek wanted nothing other than to write and concentrate on new works, but he had to split his time with the newsroom. He was quick to learn how immediate and profound an influence newspapers have on their daily readers, how beckoning responsible and edifying work is for a conscientious journalist. For years, he wrestled constantly with the desire to leave the newsroom and devote himself to his writing, but the need to speak constantly and directly to the public, to be able to have his say about events at just the right moment, was just as compelling. That is why he did not forsake his newsroom desk even after writing finally became a profession in which one could make a living in Czechoslovakia.

Olga Scheinpflugová



Karel Čapek in the newsroom at Lidové noviny



Karel Čapek also contributed to Pritomnost, a magazine which, under the guidance of Ferdinand Peroutka, became a bastion of top-class insider journalism

# NEW HOME

## Rafanda

I don't think this is the official name of the new Prague district starting to form over the Ústevské marshalling yard and Eden, but the locals have coined it Rafanda, evidently as a nod to the familiar and neighbourly feel of this brand-new township, which has been burgeoning since the late winter at a pace quite astonishing for the construction industry here.

It's rather American to look at; one would imagine this is how the houses of the gold prospectors sprang up around the new mines. You see bright, determined, destitute people here who know what they are doing and how to handle themselves: men playing at bricklayers, carpenters and engineers, proud of their skills; women able to imbue even a timber shed with cleanliness and homely bliss. Rafanda doesn't care too much for hygiene – only the better houses have lawns in the garden, but there is an insistence on it. It has no running water, and rumours that there are plans to shut off their access to the only well at the station. But Rafanda will not flinch. It has emerged spontaneously and will continue to grow on the slopes of Bolešlavce.

Karel Čapek, *Lidové noviny*, 11 April 1925



The new house of the Čapek brothers in the mid-1920s

### The man they're moving

You can recognise him by the black-and-blue hands, the assortment of bumps and bruises, and the theatrical fatigue of a man who has just done the hardest work of his life. Yesterday he was running out in front of the house and back again, agitated as he kept an eye out for the truck with his furniture. But the truck is nowhere to be seen. The man they are moving rushes to the phone and calls the removal company: Hello, the van hasn't arrived yet – Well, the phone answers, our people are probably having their breakfast about now. At midday: Hello, the van hasn't arrived yet. Well, says the phone, our people are having their lunch right now. At three, the truck finally pulls up. The man they are moving has not yet had lunch because of all the waiting. He now runs out in front of the house for the hundredth time to welcome the first piece of his furniture. But the van's deserted. Our people had gone for a quick bite.

Karel Čapek, *Lidové noviny*, 10 May 1925

### A house and its smell

I don't mean the smell of religious holidays, the steam of washhouses or even the stench of nappies. The parts where I live are young, rising against a backdrop of ringing hammers, rattling girders and the blows of the carpenter's axe. And if you blindfolded me and led me through the city, the way it breathes would tell me that this is an old street, those are new houses still awaiting some of their occupants, that is a new building that has yet to be plastered, and here they are only just digging the foundations. Before a house smells of people, it gives off the smell of the materials used to build it. It takes decades for the smells to settle and fade into the dry, dusty, ramshackle malodour of decay.

Karel Čapek



Still life with a barrel and demijohn, photo by Karel Čapek



Books on a shelf, photo by Karel Čapek



Bathroom still life, photo by Karel Čapek



African statuette, photo by Karel Čapek

1925

It started out as deeply rutted rye fields and trampled, parched land scarred with ash dumps and other eyesores. There was also a yard oozing with old slurry and a pub catering to day-trippers, where a barrel organ would be ground on a Sunday and the police would come in to shut it down; in short, the outer edges of Prague, as described in the book. Surprisingly, it was a good way out at the time. Though there was a rattling tram line just around the corner, just like today. Anyone coming here to take a look would take their leave of everyone at home with the words: "I don't know when I'll be back; I'm just going to see what we're going to build." It was at this time that the fields started to be called plots.

Karel Čapek



Josef Čapek In the Sticks, oil on canvas

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So, as every man and his dog knows, I have moved into a new pad and, consequently, I am enjoying certain novel delights (such as a garden, meadows, etc.), while trying to pay off the resulting debts, so far only with very limited success. Otherwise it's nice and mostly impracticable; it is impossible to beaze in here as the roads have been dug up for the various sewer pipes, connections, lines, etc. This also gives me the enormous pleasure of solitude; no visitors can beat a path to me.

Letter to Vera Alazgova, spring 1925



Karel Čapek – fox-terrier breeder



Antonín Čapek lived in the basement of the house until his death in 1929



In the dining room



Karel Čapek at his desk

A new house does not lose its peculiar aroma immediately. Just as new clothes smell like fabric and new shoes like a tannery, a house smells like a construction site for a long time. Lord, it takes a good while before people feel at home in it. For a time, the house clusters around them like some temporary appendage; it doesn't grow on them like a shell on a snail, but, like new clothes, some bits stick out where they shouldn't and others are tight around the neck. It has to subside a little in order to adapt to people; we might say that it takes several years to mature. It well and truly becomes a home only when it ceases to be a new home; then it is no longer just the work of the builder, but also of the people who live in it.

Karel Čapek, *Lidové noviny*, 8 October 1933



View of the house with the conservatory



Josef Čapek: Drawer with Sewing, oil on canvas



Roasting pan with goose on the hob, photo by Karel Čapek



Karel Čapek had the conservatory built at the beginning of the 1930s



Original reception room on the ground floor of the house, until 1935 the room of the "Friday Men"

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# FRIDAY MEN

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*Fridays at the Author's started when a couple of writers began to meet up at his house on Thursday afternoons. First there was František Langer and Fráňa Šrámek, joined later by Peroutka, Vančura and others, depending on who happened to accompany whom. The number of regulars gradually increased, perhaps because the black coffee encouraged free and flowing discourse. They were journalists, painters, university teachers, doctors – all that this diverse group had in common was that it did not belong to any literary coterie or political faction and that it was partial to an open, and sometimes quite polemical, exchange of views. In short, it was like a men's debating club of intellectuals between the ages of thirty and forty, though that wasn't always the case either. Overall, a random and lively grouping of people who were as interested in literature as they were in politics, philosophy – as a last resort, all kinds of science, and human life in general.*

Karel Čapek



Poet Fráňa Šrámek (left) and Karel Čapek, mid-1920s



Writer František Langer, photo by Karel Čapek

*One of the participants mentioned to the president that a literary, journalistic and university group of mostly younger men was meeting at the Author's. That was something a forever-young old man could not pass up. "Tell them I would go if they would have me," he said at once. The Author was moving to a new neighbourhood at the time. He took the first opportunity he could to extend an invitation to the president from all the Friday Men. "Gracias, I will come," said T. G. M. "Let's say next Friday."*

Karel Čapek



Adolf Hoffmeister: Friday Men, cartoon



President T. G. Masaryk during a stay in Topolčany, photo by Karel Čapek

*Mr. President, I would like to thank you once again for the honour you bestowed not only on me, but on us writers and our friends by your visit on Friday. When you left, everyone was suddenly brimming with what they wanted to tell you and what they wanted to hear about from you. There is nothing for it now but to look forward and hope that perhaps you might once again find a spare moment that you will not regret devoting to us. I can say, on behalf of almost everyone you saw at mine on Friday, that we were deprived of you in our youth; you stopped teaching while we were at university, and thus we lost the only philosophical figure who could have had a direct and vital effect on us. How we nevertheless found you, not only in books, but also in life, is another story. I also just wanted to tell you, with our heartfelt thanks, that last Friday you made up to our generation, at least for once, what we lost back then. We all beseech you – if we may be so bold – that you visit us again; otherwise we would be worried that you were not satisfied with us. With respectful devotion and gratitude*

Karel Čapek, Křtlovské Vlastnosti, 23 March 1926



At the invitation of President T. G. Masaryk, the Friday Men spent a weekend in Láry in May 1926. From left: T. Adolf (partially), Vladislav Vančura, František Kubka, Josef Kopta, Bohumil Pilný, Fráňa Šrámek, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, František Langer, Karel Čapek, Josef Kodzák, Josef Čapek



President T. G. Masaryk during a stay in Topolčany, photo by Karel Čapek

*I had heard about Čapek's Fridays. As many of the Friday Men were my friends, I had been told about the meetings not only by him, but also by them. One of the stern rules of their simple statutes was the decision that no woman would be granted access to them, either as a member or as a guest... The Čapek family house was not large enough to accommodate more guests than the thirty Friday Men. Though they were never all there at the same time, many requested that a guest be permitted to attend. All it would have taken was for one woman to enter this society and many would have immediately brought their wives, but the rooms, modestly dimensioned as they were, could not have fitted them in. And apparently they all wanted to talk men's talk, as was explained to me by Karel Poláček, who missed only a few Fridays a year.*

Olga Scheinpflugová

## THE FRIDAY MEN THROUGH THE LENS OF KAREL ČAPEK



Josef Čapek (1887–1945), painter and writer



Arne Laurin (1889–1945), publicist and critic



Bohumil Pilný (1883–1965), publisher



Jan Blahoslav Kozák (1889–1974), philosopher, theologian



Josef Kopta (1894–1962), writer, journalist



Josef Macek (1887–1972), economist, sociologist



Josef Palivec (1886–1975), diplomat, poet



Otakar Vočadlo (1895–1974), university teacher, linguist

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Městská  
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# WEDDING

1935

... Why is everything white here, why is there peace, when there is such order, I must get in line, no, I'll be good, no longer at night will I peer into the terrible, yawning, black abyss of night and I will lie still, my hands clasped upon my chest, man, why aren't you married, why aren't you married...

Karel Čapek, 1935



Karel Čapek and Olga Scheinpflugová were married on 26 August 1935 at Vinohrady Town Hall



Wedding gift - lifetime use of a country house in Stará Huť - Strž

As a wedding gift, the newly-wed Čapeks were granted use of a country house in Stará Huť, near Dobříš, for life by a relative, Václav Palivec. They grew very fond of the house and spent their free time here in 1935-38.



Karel and Olga with Ferdinand Peroutka in Strž, 1938



And yet the moment came when life seemed bigger and more powerful to me than anything anyone could have written. I was engulfed by a wave of so much happiness that I even once decided to leave the theatre, at least for a time, to enjoy how captivating everyday life can be as a couple. Here was my husband, the homes we shared in Prague and Strž, arguing together about what the highest value of life was. We wanted to travel, to see the world together through our two pairs of eyes, and to enjoy sharing a roof over our heads... I saw the cosy rooms of my home, an armchair in which there was never time to sit, books that, as a reader, I never had time to read again... I didn't know that in a moment my private life would be lost and that I would soon have no choice but to devote myself to other people's problems on the stage and in literature.

Olga Scheinpflugová



Olga at a glacier, photo by Karel Čapek



In the summer of 1936, the couple travelled together to Scandinavia



Olga Scheinpflugová and Karel Čapek during a visit to Václav Palivec in Osov

Dear little girl, have you often asked what comes after love? I will tell you what comes with love, and it is so powerful that it will outlive even love: it is clothing, clothing, a real closeness that means nothing but to give. I'm telling you, it's something very beautiful.

Karel Čapek to Olga Scheinpflugová, 15 August 1921



The couple in Strž, 1921



Adjustments to the attic of the Prague home after Olga Scheinpflugová moved in, 1935-1936

Dear Helena, I couldn't stop by in Písek this time because it is my wedding tomorrow, because I need material for Maudie (you didn't even mention what you thought of it), and because mushrooms are not in season. I hope you will get along well with my wife. You know, from now on I won't have to take any work and personally. Olga would like to buy or build a smaller villa somewhere in the neighbourhood. We will have two households, even if it is expensive. Besides, a villa like this is a good investment these days. So if you know of anything, please advise...

Karel Čapek to his sister Helena Poláková, 25 August 1935



Olga Scheinpflugová in her study, 1945

I found refuge in the walls of home. I wanted to maintain it as though Karel had just got up from his desk and gone to take a break in the garden.

Olga Scheinpflugová

After a wretched school performance of Mother at Easter, a time during which her troubled, ailing heart was meant to calm down before the next performance of Čapek's Mother at Professor Charvát's clinic, her death became a sad reality on 13 April 1968. This confirmed, once and for all, that what hurt her most was the peace and tranquillity. It was only in a state of constant hustle and bustle that she was able to put off death so frequently until the age of sixty-five.

František Kréma



Actors from Vinohrady Theatre visit Olga Scheinpflugová in the autumn of 1967



Olga Scheinpflugová 1967

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# HOBBIES

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The Čapek brothers landscaping their garden, 1920s

Your garden expresses how cultural a being you are just as much as your flat or your library does. It shows at a glance what demands you place on beauty, order or harmony, and not only that: it also shows what you know and what you are capable of; it betrays whether you work this small piece of land just for the sake of appearances, or whether, on the contrary, you want to figure out the particular rules that govern any good work.

Karel Čapek



Karel Čapek looks for plant name tags, 1920s



Adolf Hoffmeister: The Čapek brothers' garden, cartoon, 1920s

If it were of any use, the gardener would fall to his knees every day and pray like this: "Lord God, make things somehow so that it rains every day from about midnight to three in the morning, but, you know, slowly and warmly so that it can soak in; but don't let it rain on my sticky catchfly, alyssum, rock rose, lavender, and that other stuff known to You in Your infinite wisdom as xerophytes – if you want, I can write them down on a sheet of paper; and let the sun shine all day, but not everywhere (I mean, not on the meadowsweets, nor on the gentians, the hostas, or the rhododendrons) and not too much; let there be a lot of dew, but not much wind, plenty of earthworms, no aphids or snails, no mildew, and, once a week, let it rain diluted slurry and pigeon droppings, amen." Because, know this: this is how it was in the Garden of Eden; otherwise it wouldn't have grown as it did...

Karel Čapek



The Čapek brothers in the Botanical Garden, 1920s

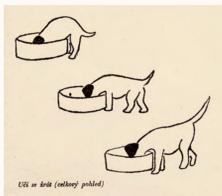


Dášienka the dog, photo by Karel Čapek, 1931

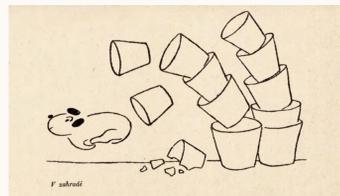
... The most interesting thing about this photographic dalliance is when the puppy develops (I mean in the developer in the darkroom)...

Karel Čapek

The book Dášienka, with photographs and drawings by the author, together with Josef Čapek's I Had a Dog and a Cat, became the first modern literature for children.



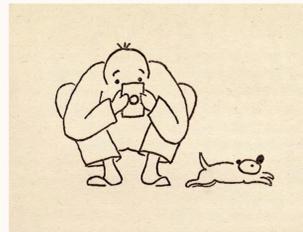
Karel Čapek: illustration for Dášienka



F. v. s. v. s. v. s.

A hobby is a male instinct for expertise manifested as play. For a hobby remains a hobby if it is a game and a private pleasure that one keeps to oneself.

Karel Čapek



Karel Čapek taking pictures



Karel Čapek taking pictures



Head of a horse, photo by Karel Čapek

He began taking photographs in the late 1920s. He bought a Rolleiflex SLR, and, after cutting his teeth, he set up a darkroom, bought an enlarger, papers, chemicals, and other equipment, and experimented with a variety of techniques. He took pictures of flowers, flocks of sheep and geese, dogs, cats, horses, cows, old masonry, baskets, watering cans, old shoes, interesting flowers, architecture... He needed a lot of persuasion to take the camera when he went with us on trips, and he would only take four or five photos throughout the whole month. There was no need: he had already learnt what there was to learn about photography; he knew how to do it, so why take pictures? And more's the pity. He had a keen eye and there are many nice and interesting things among the negatives he left behind. For example, a set of pictures from a Slovakia that no longer exists, with striking wooden cottages, herds of cattle, fords across the river, gypsy women smoking pipes, cowhide upholstery...

Karel Scheinpflug



Old woman with a pipe, photo by Karel Čapek

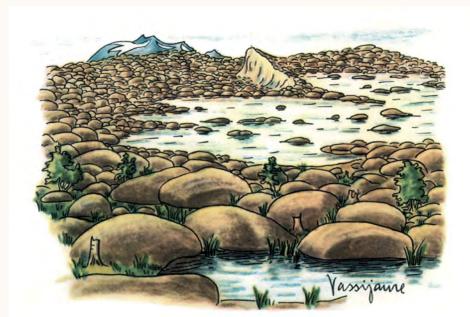
## Succulents

Don't think I have a collection of them; I only have four pots and a live-forever, yet still this vegetation amazes me. One cactus looks like it has made up its mind to sprout a scrap of raw mutton. It's red, perhaps a little mauve, thick, and very similar to a deformed biscuit. This wonder of nature is, to be brutally honest, rather repulsive... But the strangest of all is the ordinary live-forever. After planting it, I left it to its own devices, let it show what it was capable of. Well, it turns out it can do something quite peculiar wherever on itself it wants – in an armpit, on its back, from its crown – it pushes out a little green scaly head, which breaks off, rolls into the dirt, puts down roots and grows like mad. What would I do if a child began to sprout in my armpit or on my chest or in the back of my neck...

Karel Čapek



Succulents, photo by Karel Čapek



Karel Čapek: illustration for his book Travels in the North

... However, he decided to illustrate his travel notes with his own sketches, just as he had when travelling through England, Spain and the Netherlands. In Copenhagen, he bought some small sextodecimo sketchbooks and sketched everything that he found of interest. He drew his sketches with a three-centimetre stub of a pencil he carried around in his waistcoat pocket. For the most part, they were scribbles that were hard to make out. Especially if he happened to be standing or in a hurry. On the journey from Oslo to Bergen, he stood or sat for hours at the train window, drawing one sketch after another to capture the passing scenery... After dinner at the hotel or on a ship, when there was nothing to look at, he would take out his book of trophies, lay it on the table, and sometimes polish the sketches he had made. However, he did not paint pictures from them until he was back home.

Karel Scheinpflug

# FINAL YEARS

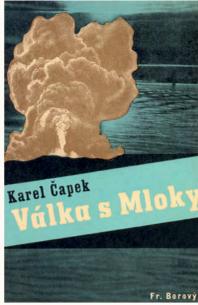
KAREL ČAPEK 130



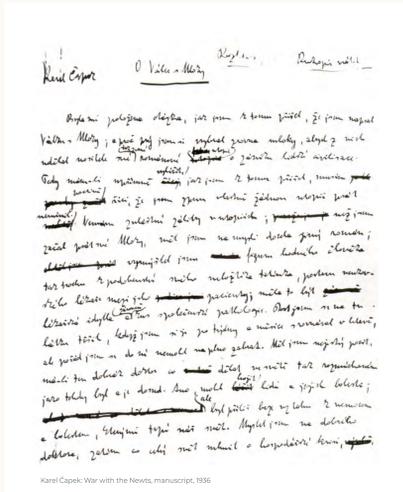
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"I have read your novel War with the Nechts, which, fortunately, has been translated into German. No story has gripped or impressed me like this in a long time. There is something absolutely magnificent about your satirical take on Europe's abysmal folly, and I feel this madness with you as I watch the grotesque and horrific plot of the story unfold."

Thomas Mann in a letter to Karel Čapek



War with the Nechts, novel, published by František Borový, 1936.



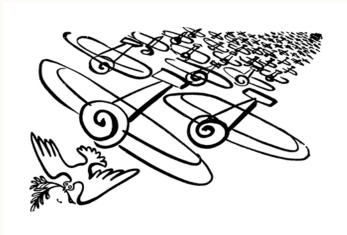
Karel Čapek: War with the Nechts, manuscript, 1936

1938



Karel Čapek at the reception of the PEN Club Congress in the garden of Czernin Palace, 29 June 1938

Karel Čapek was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature every year from 1932 to 1938. Each nomination was signed by a group of about ten professors from Charles University. The nominations were submitted to the Nobel Committee at the Swedish Academy. The committee could draw on nomination opinions prepared by experts at the Nobel Institute. The Nobel Institute's expert on Slavic literature at the time of Čapek's nominations was Professor Anton Karlgren, a Swedish Slavist. Based on the expert opinions provided to it, the Nobel Committee wrote a statement on each candidate. These statements were used as a basis by the Swedish Academy in awarding the prize. The closest Karel Čapek came to being awarded the Nobel Prize was in 1938. Despite the glowing expert report, however, the committee members recommended waiting a little longer before awarding the prize to Čapek...



Josef Čapek: Who's Who and What's What, anti-war cartoon, 7 September 1938

To be honest, I can't imagine the face of a man saying: I want war. But if you want peace - I am referring here not to parties or leaders, but to private individuals like myself. If you really want peace, peace for yourself and your children, peace for the nation you love - then that is enough. Then we can work out an agreement.

Karel Čapek, 1938

As the 1930s were drawing to a close, Čapek repeatedly and emphatically spoke out against the threat of fascism in Czechoslovakia and in Europe as a whole. He authored countless articles warning of the grave danger that Nazi Germany posed to peace in Europe, and provided refuge and emergency assistance to the Third Reich's refugees and exiles. His major literary works of the period are barely disguised denunciations of the Nazi regime. But he faced a perplexing dilemma in opposing fascism with such vehemence. Could he advocate resisting it by force if necessary? To take up arms against one's adversaries meant not only to acknowledge the object failure of communication, but also to assert that some values were worth dying and killing for. Čapek's 1938 play Mother explores this dilemma in detail. A confirmed pacifist since the First World War, Čapek nevertheless came to a clear conclusion: in some cases, violence is not only justified but also necessary. Those who have chosen violence must be opposed with violence. Closely observing the actions and rhetoric of the Nazi regime, Čapek concluded that such was the case in Europe in 1938. In Mother he reluctantly but decisively endorsed the use of force to counter the threat of Nazi aggression and defend the Czechoslovak state. Čapek's relativism was not a suicide pact.

Thomas Ort

There is another propaganda: personal contact with foreign countries. For an author somewhat known abroad, this meant - especially in a year when the world's interest in us snowballed - receiving at least one foreign journalist or writer or reporter every day at home, in the newsroom, or in a rural out-of-the-way place, speaking in broken foreign languages and explaining how and what the situation was and where it would lead... This includes the international PEN Club Congress in Prague... out of three hundred registered writers, about a third of them cancelled, citing the uncertainty of the times, but even so it was one of the largest and really best organised of congresses. This is no mean feat: securing private subsidies, rooms in Prague (a city already packed because of the Sokol festival), vehicles and all manner of odds and ends. The writer of these lines claims joint responsibility for some of the Prague congress's calculated arrangements: the fact that the congress was chaired by our then prime minister (this excluded all aggressive and disruptive politicising from the congress proceedings out of obligatory deference to the responsible head of government). Furthermore, the fact that our hospitality culminated in a beautiful festival of Sokol youth (this was perhaps the best propaganda for a nation so seriously endangered and yet so clear and disciplined). And then there was the fact that our army invited the writers of so many nations to Milovice to show them that it was ready for anything...

Karel Čapek, 26 November 1938



From left: French writer Jules Romains (president of the World Federation of PEN Clubs), Karel Čapek, Metod Zvonil (abbot of Strahov Monastery), and Olga Scheinpflugová in the Royal Garden at Prague Castle, 29 June 1938



From left: Olga Scheinpflugová, Danish writer Svend Borberg, Karel Čapek, and translator Else Weish-Neuhard in the Wallenstein Garden during an evening at the PEN Club Congress

An epoch of life and of our young state was over. My one, the main one, and certainly, for me, the best one. We had to gather ourselves in readiness for a worse era, a quite bad one. Karel Čapek was dead and a war awaited us, a war that, for everyone, was inescapable and as certain as the setting of the sun in the evening.

Olga Scheinpflugová



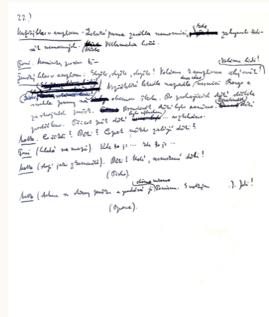
Olga Scheinpflugová in Stráž, 1939



Karel Čapek: The White Disease, Zdeněk Štěpánek as the Marshal, premiere on 29 January 1937



Karel Čapek: Mother, Leopolda Dostalová in the titular role, with Zdeněk Štěpánek as the Father, Premiere on 12 February 1938



Karel Čapek: Mother, final part of the manuscript



František Bída: Combat Training - the Čapeks Introduce Early-morning Exercises, cartoon

Then came the funeral. We were now in a time when people were afraid to go to someone's funeral - just like under the Havičáks. There weren't many people there. Of the writers, Hora, Bass, Rutte and I spoke over the grave. I linked my words to our friendship and mentioned a note that he had written and that Olga had found in Stráž: "Fix Ferda's bedside lamp." With no one wanting to bury Karel Čapek at the time, the Catholic Church took on the lonely task of burying him in its cemetery. Not so much as a flag was unfurled at the National Theatre, which had lived off of Čapek for so long.

Ferdinand Peroutka



Karel Čapek's funeral took place in the Basilica of St Peter and St Paul, Vyšehrad, on 29 December 1938



Lidové noviny announces the death of Karel Čapek



Karel Čapek died of pneumonia in his bedroom on 25 December 1938



Karel Čapek's tomb in Vyšehrad Cemetery

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# LEGACY

*Acknowledging the enormous complexity of reality, for me, is a matter of respect for reality; respect that escalates into amazement. We humans have been given a patch of the universe to conquer; we reach into its depths in more than one way; we probe it with our actions, science, poetry, love, and religion; we need various methods to measure our world. The immense value of life cannot be estimated from one aspect alone. I believe that somewhere here we are touching on the pain of today's people that, though not localized, is fascinating.*

Karel Čapek



Karel Čapek with a robot figure, London, 1924



Karel Čapek: R.U.R. (Robots), Aventinum, Prague, 1920, cover designed by Josef Čapek



Čapek brothers: The Insect Play (Comedy), Aventinum, Prague, 1921, cover designed by Josef Čapek



Karel Čapek: Kraťasové (Novels), František Borový, First edition published by Aventinum, Prague, 1924



Karel Čapek: Hordubal, Meteor, Ordinary Life ("Hořké Imago"), Československý spisovatel, First edition published by František Borový, Prague, 1933 and 1934

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Karel Čapek in 1938

*He paid for his uniqueness all his life: Czech littleness never forgave him for being too smart, too active, too successful for not being tied down by any one absolute. He was wrong in all their eyes. Geysers of malice showered down on the end of his career, and his Czech destiny was finished off by whom, and in the name of what, he was upbraided even after his death.*

Jiří Opelík



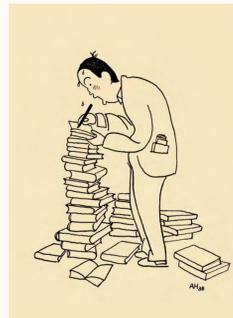
Book-signing event, after 1933

*I must stress that, for several generations, certainly in part because democracy in Czechoslovakia was only a memory of the past for half a century, there were many readers for whom Karel Čapek represented and symbolised anti-ideological thinking, tolerance and democratic values, the art of the free, enslaved by no doctrine. I believe that he can be perceived in this way anywhere else in the world, too: as a man who, in the midst of a confused, insane epoch that was preparing for the bloodiest clash in history, defended people against any manipulation, and his assertion that we can succeed only if we understand and recognise the values that humanity has already created, and if we are able no longer lose them, no longer stray from them, are as urgent today as they were in his day.*

Ivan Klíma



From left: Karel Čapek, Josef Čapek and Vítězslav Nebeš at an autograph session in 1934



Adolf Hoffmeister: Karel Čapek Signing His Books, cartoon, 1938

*Karel worked with his brother Josef in the Národní listy newsroom. When Josef was sacked, Karel decided to leave the newsroom with him. When he then joined another newspaper, Lidové noviny, it was on condition that his brother would also work there. The two brothers lived together in a flat in Růžka Street in the Lesser Quarter, even after Josef got married. It was not until their parents moved into the flat in October 1923 that Josef briefly broke away from his brother. Less than two years later, however, they built a duplex villa together in Uzká Street, Vinohrady. Since 1947, that street has borne their name.*

Ivan Klíma



The Čapek brothers

## THE HOUSE OF KAREL ČAPEK



View of Karel Čapek's house from the garden, 2007



The Čapek's split house, 2019, photo by Matěj Chabera

The borough of Prague 10 bought Karel Čapek's house from an heir in 2013. Since then, a lot of work has been done. In particular, an extensive set of authentic items, preserved in the house as part of the purchase, has been inventoried. On the basis of a survey and records carried out by National Heritage Institute staff, the collection was entered in the Ministry of Culture's Central Register of Collections. Some of the collection is being professionally restored. Documents from the estate are being processed at the Prague City

Archive. The house's architecture and history has been thoroughly surveyed and the project documentation necessary to permit the reconstruction has been prepared. These efforts should result in the reconstruction of the house's interior and exterior. It will then be opened to the public as an extraordinary cultural centre – a monument associated with a famous artist, whose creative legacy is becoming increasingly relevant.



Original interior of the house at the time of purchase by the borough of Prague 10



Ground-floor reception room



Karel Čapek's study in the attic



The Friday Men's room in the attic

*20th-century art is unthinkable without the Čapek brothers. The transformation of their biological brotherhood into a creative brotherhood was a rarity. Their early joint writing gave way, as they matured, to a parallelism of intentions and goals, building on their shared knowledge of humanism, non-political politics, religion without a god, and the timeliness and vitality of their own work. Due to the seriousness of their work and their tragic personal destinies, the Čapek brothers became moral authorities in the nation.*

Jiří Opelík



Josef Čapek: Josef Čapek in the painting workshop at Sachsenhausen concentration camp, watercolour, 1943



Bergen-Belsen concentration camp memorial, Josef Čapek died in the camp in April 1945

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# COUNTRY OF THE FUTURE

## KAREL ČAPEK'S STAYS IN SLOVAKIA

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### AUGUST 1912



Trenčianske Teplice, Kursalon, period view, early 20th century



Trenčianske Teplice, Hammam Turkish Baths, period view, early 20th century

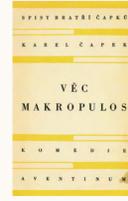
This was the first year that Čapek holidayed at his parents in Trenčianske Teplice, where his father worked as a spa physician. He went on to repeat his stays here in 1913 and 1916-23. He spent his time here working on the final version of his comedy *The Outlaw* and the drama *R.U.R.*

### JUNE-JULY 1922

A three-week holiday in the High Tatras, working on the play *The Makropulos Affair*.



View of Lomnický štít from the Grandhotel Praha in Tatranská Lomnica, where Karel Čapek stayed in 1922



Karel Čapek: *The Makropulos Affair*, Aventinum, Prague, 1922

### SEPTEMBER 1926



Guests at the Hviezdoslav Hotel in Srtňské Pleso, Karel Čapek second from the right, 1928

A holiday in the High Tatras, followed by a stay in Topoľčianky with President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. It was here that he drafted the first literary records of Masaryk's memoirs, which later became *Talks with TGM*; he made repeat visits in 1927-30. During the 1920s and 1930s, Karel Čapek and his company of actors and artists also visited the homestead of arts patron Maximilián Schwarz in Rumanová, near the Slovak city of Nitra.



Josef Čapek in the Mountains, oil on canvas, 1935



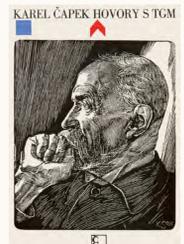
From left: Božena Scheinpflugová, Maximilián Schwarz, Olga Scheinpflugová, and Karel Čapek in Peniny, 1927

... There is another corner of the world, over there on the Polish border, but it is rather out of the way. It is called Peniny. The green river Dunajec flows through here, with Poland on its left bank and us on its right. On our side is the abandoned and half-empty village of Červený Kláštor and an inn serving a particularly strong and sweet wine. Along the river Dunajec, there are these special ferries made from hollowed-out trunks that carry you along the green rapids separating the two countries and among some very beautiful limestone rocks...

Karel Čapek: *One foot in the Tatras*, *Lidové noviny*, 4 September 1927

*I have work to do here. I am writing the president's intimate memoirs and reflections. It will be a whole book to be published next year. It will cover his entire life, his childhood, his loves, etc. You know, he's reached the age where he can't really put it off much longer, and he can devote more time to it here than he could in Prague. He talks to me for about two hours a day, and then I desperately have to find an hour or so to write some brief notes or, preferably, to write it all up in full... It will be a great and good thing, a rare human document, the likes of which are few in the world. I'm sure you understand that this is a labour of love for me.*

Letter from Karel Čapek to Olga Scheinpflugová, Topoľčianky, 3 October 1927



Karel Čapek: *Talks with TGM Masaryk*, later edition, Československý spisovatel, Prague, 1968; originally published in three volumes in 1928-35

... That is: once you put on your breeches and hobnailed boots you feel a rush of courage and strength, even if you are otherwise the most sensible and languid of fellows. So here these breeches and boots run up, let's say, the peaks of Solisko or Bujoca, clamber over boulders, trek through the mountain pine and fallen trees, until, at the top, they sit down breathless, snack on bacon and chocolate, and experience a peculiar sense of well-being made up, in parts, of fatigue, pride, vertigo and astonishment at how strangely and exceedingly beautiful the world is...

Karel Čapek: *One foot in the Tatras*, *Lidové noviny*, 4 September 1927



The Čapek brothers on holiday, Ružomberok, 1930



Karel Čapek at rest, Topoľčianky, end of the 1920s

*In the morning, until ten or half ten, a walk with the president, then I go off to read the newspaper and, for an hour or so, I tinker with the *Talks*. After that it's time for lunch, usually outside under the trees because it is baking hot and there is not a cloud in sight. We sit there until three, and at half three we take a carriage ride into the country and take potatoes and corn. Then we return and quickly change for dinner. The place is always teeming with people from all over the world. I have to clean up in four languages, mostly English. My dear, you have no idea what hard work it is.*

Letter from Karel Čapek to Olga Scheinpflugová, Topoľčianky, 7 September 1928

### AUGUST 1930

Karel and his brother Josef stayed in Oravský Podzámok, going on car trips with Jiří Foustka and taking photos of the landscape and locals.



Oravský Podzámok, where the Čapek brothers would spend their holidays in the 1930s



The brothers in Podzámok, 1930



The house (left) in Oravský Podzámok where Josef Čapek and his family stayed on numerous occasions has a commemorative plaque. Karel Čapek stayed in the hotel next door



Photographs taken by Karel Čapek in Orava, 1930



... To be sure, it is impoverished and neglected, but you have no idea of the potential here and how one day it be will as famous as the Alpine valleys; a land of fresh air and sweet scents, of forests and mountains. It just needs people to discover it and learn to manage all this beauty carefully and considerately...

Karel Čapek: *Karel Čapek*, *Lidové noviny*, 26 October 1930

### AUGUST 1931



From left: Alice Masaryková, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Karel Čapek in Bystřička, early 1930s

Čapek visited President Masaryk in Bystřička, near Martin, and travelled to Orava.

### SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1932, 1933

Čapek stayed at Masaryk's in Topoľčianky.



The ruins of Hrušov Castle, one of Masaryk's favourite destinations for trips when he was in Topoľčianky



A monument commemorating the first president's stays marks the site of the bonfire

... The clearing under Hrušov Castle, where the bonfire flares up in the dusk; the flames are a sight to behold... The column of blue smoke, peppered with sparks, is also marvellous. Železná bouda, beyond Skýcov, the limestone village; you are in the thickest of the mountains here. There is this urge to stand in silence and let your eyes wander over the valleys and mountain ranges...

Karel Čapek: *Lidové noviny*, 28 October 1933

Let's not go to Slovakia only to judge them on their ethnographic past! Because this is the country of the future. Slovak folk architecture is essentially and ingeniously made from wood and the laws of life. The stylistic purity of the Slovak village sets an example for the future of town-planning. During my latest wanderings around Slovakia, I have also been enchanted by the charm particular to the people here, which is very much to their favour when I compare it to the coarseness of the Czechs. In this respect, too, we have plenty to discover in and learn from Slovakia.

Karel Čapek: *Slovakia and Us*, *Pestrý týden*, 4 April 1931



Josef Čapek Singing Girls, oil on canvas, 1936



Photographs taken by Karel Čapek in Slovakia, 1930

Castle or not, it's like a village here. It smells like a village, and beyond the rails of the quiet park there is the babble and blare of children, herds of livestock and peasant carts, the quacking of ducks and the honking of geese. God only knows with how many voices a village such as this is blessed. It's like a picture book of lively and intimate sounds; just flip through the pages. The yelling of children signals the end of the school day; the sonorous and exalted peels tell us that it is noon, the mooing cows that it is evening...

Karel Čapek: *Lidové noviny*, 28 October 1933



Topoľčianky Chateau, seat of the president, photo by Karel Čapek, 1930



# MIND THAT YOU AT LEAST BE FAIR TO THIS TIME

KAREL  
ČAPEK  
130



PRAHA 10  
2020

1922

Anyone who believes in a Truth thinks he has the right to hate and kill a person who believes in a Truth of another brand. Is there no remedy to this implacable hatred? I see none but the knowledge that man is something more valuable than his "truth", that we can understand each other despite the differences in our faith, how we cook our cabbage, or what we think of John of Nepomuk.

1925

We live in the demeaning knowledge that the political classes do whatever they like with us. The only thing we are good for is our vote; all else that democracy gives us is political impotence. It makes fools of us for electing MPs who are no MPs of ours, for entrusting all power in the state to a parliament that is no longer a parliament, and for the fact that laws and reforms are made in our name that are not good laws and reforms. We are demeaned by the indignity of a parliament whose parties engage in horse-trading even to deal with affairs of state. We are demeaned by a parliamentary system in which the needs of the state would not be defended were there no gross and honoured majority. We are demeaned and disheartened by the mundaneness of political discourse; political exponents are as indifferent to anything way outside the domestic interests of their parties as a cotter is to an aviator. We are demeaned by the obviousness with which our swashbuckling politicians accept that the state is handed over to the parties for exploitation. We are demeaned by the personal standards of many whom the parties have appointed rulers of the nation's affairs. We are demeaned by the form and spirit of politics governing on the strength of impure trade-offs between unscrupulous interests.

1926

Or a scandal erupts, during which it turns out that the protagonist is lying like a rug. Though this, too, could happen anywhere, I dare say that nowhere else in the world could a person caught lying not be withdrawn, perhaps tacitly, discreetly and mercifully, from the public gaze. All over the world, any decent person would automatically assume that anyone caught in such circumstances would suffer certain inescapable consequences. It would take very dishonest plebeianism to pretend that it was no big deal, and only a complete and wretched absence of a code of practice could cause people of normal instincts to shed, in politics, the standards that they could not do without in their private lives.

1928

The natural history of our landscapes is as remarkable as any great historical monument; before the history of the nation, there was a history of geological and geobotanical eras; before all human glory, there was the glory of nature's forces. The protection of rare natural monuments is not a question of sentimentality, but of obligatory respect. These monuments, whether an ancient tree, an ancient stand or a rare geological formation, present us with something more honourable than the business interests of Mr Jones or Mr Smith.

1931

It is difficult to defend the public interest if the public is not sure what its interest really is. Suppressing evil is thankless when the difference between good and evil is so imprecisely described in public life, if the public cannot tell the difference between honour and dishonour, between truth and slander, between struggle and treachery; if the public does not have a nose for what is contemptible, rude, malicious, lousy and corrupt, and when there is hopeless confusion in distinguishing between the worth and worthlessness of people, principles and deeds.

1932

Every political order is made of people. Democracy is not made of human rights, but of people and their actions.

1932

Mind that you at least be fair to this time. It is not a small and petty time. Frankly, everything is at stake, the social and political organisation of the world. An immense and complex act is being played out on the stage. You have been born into a terribly monumental and malleable epoch; you must not be misled by the fact that you see only rather undignified squabbling, selfish bickering, and quarrels over words. Like salt, we will need leaders and workers everywhere and in everything, and in any event accomplished people ready to be sabre-rattlers and not just sword-bearers. You may lament that you were not born in a more idyllic era, but if you want to be a man of your time, then look to free yourself from the captivity of words and slogans and grow as much as you can into reality. Reality never gets old; it contains what has yet to be.

1934

It takes a lot of love for people and respect for life to get justice for everyone on earth.

1938

Yes, much has changed, but people have remained the same; though now we have a better grasp of who is who. He who is polite has always been polite; he who was faithful is faithful still. He who bows to the wind bowed to the wind before. He who thinks his time has come has always thought only of himself. No one becomes a turncoat who has not always been one; he who changes faith had none; you can't remake a person, he will just show you his true colours.

1938

Let no one, no nation, no state be sure of itself when human relationships can be corrupted at any time by the tools of lies. There can be no certainty, no contracts, nothing valid or secure as long as the consciousness of any nation is distorted by wilful lies. Behind every lie is malice and violence; every lie is an assault on the safety of the world. No one will live in peace, even behind the strongest walls of steel and concrete; the winged lie will thumb its nose at all your fortresses. Ridding the world of lies is about more than disarmament.

Prayer for Truth



Karel Čapek in Cambridge, England, 1924



Josef Čapek: Karel Čapek as a robot, cartoon, 1921

To read a lot is not to devour books, but to read a few of the best ones well; to converse a lot is not to churn out many words, but to use a few words to get to the heart of the matter. To live a lot is not to pursue riches, but to live slowly and strongly.



Hóns: The Čapek Brothers, cartoon, 1923



Otakar Mikiš: Eduard Bass and Karel Čapek, cartoon

I think it was Aristotle who defined man as a political animal. This is a very wise idea, but it is not entirely clear whether Aristotle means that man is a strange animal that makes politics or that a man who makes politics is – to put it bluntly – a beast. Each of these interpretations has something to it.



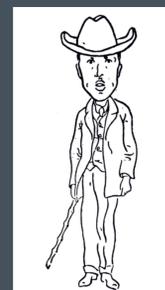
Josef Čapek: Creators, cartoon, 1927

*What is of most beauty in the world is not things, but moments, instants, elusive seconds.*



František Bidlo: April Fool's Pranks, cartoon

The kingdom of lies is not where the lie is told, but where the lie is accepted.



Karel Čapek: Self-portrait, cartoon

KAREL ČAPEK 130



Městská  
část  
Praha 10