

## Karel Čapek

Karel Čapek was one of the most known Czech writers (his time Czechoslovakia) of the 20th century. His works were mostly anti-fascist and he criticized the Nazi Germany. He is best known for his novels *Krakatit* or *War with the Newts* and also for his plays *The White Disease* and *R.U.R.* (where was firstly used the word *robot*).

And what about his life?

Čapek was born in 1890 in a small village in Bohemia. He had two siblings; especially his brother Josef was very close to him. Later in their lives they cooperated on their works.



Čapek studied at a high school in

Hradec Kralové (the principal town in eastern Bohemia), but he was expelled for taking part in an illegal students club. He moved to Prague, where he started the final two years of high school at the prestigious Academic High School. He spent six years at the Charles University in Prague but he also studied at the Sorbonne in Paris. His life (including his works) was strongly affected by

the World War I. He started his career like a journalist in *Národní listy* (National paper) and later he also took part in some other editorial offices. Čapek, his brother Josef and some other editors resigned in protest of the paper's politics. He also became a dramatic advisor in Vinohrady Theatre.



In his life he developed close relationships with many of the political leaders including the first president of Czechoslovakia Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. In November 1934 he signed a Czech writers' petition against Nazi disturbances. Čapek wrote the *Czechoslovak writers' note*

With Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk

to the whole world where is explained the Czechoslovak opinions towards Germany.

He got married in 1935 with an actress and writer Olga Scheinpflug. In November 1938 the possibility to leave the country is offered to Čapek, but even though he would be the first one to be arrested by Germans, he decided to stay. On December 25 Čapek died of an inflammation of the kidneys. Therefore he could not be put down by the regime.

Some of his works

As was said at the beginning of this article his most important plays are R.U.R. and The White Disease. So let's get some information about them.

R.U.R was written in 1920 and stands for Rosumovi Univerzální Roboti (Rossum's Universal Robots). In this book was firstly used word Robot, which quickly became known worldwide. The word is derived from the word 'robota', which means work. In this play, Čapek warns us against the negative effects of technology that may appear in the future. By 1923 it had been translated into thirty languages.



His plays are well played even these days

The White Disease was written at the time of increasing threat from Nazi Germany to Czechoslovakia. The story takes place in one unnamed country which represents Germany with one extra, somewhat absurd addition: an incurable white disease, a mysterious form of leprosy, is selectively killing off people older than 45.

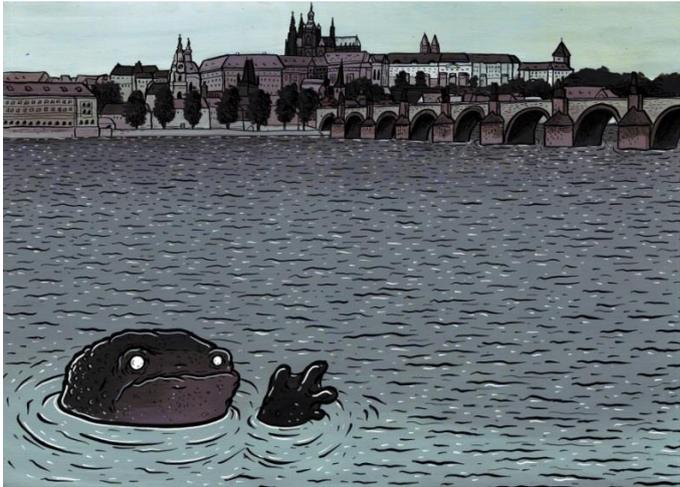
He is also well known for his novels as Krakatit, War with the Newts, The Absolute at Large...

Krakatit was written in 1922. It is a novel about the abuse of science for human gain. The hero is a chemist Mr. Prokop, who was able to produce exceptionally powerful explosive. He calls it "Kratatit," after the Indonesian volcano Krakatoa. A special feature of Krakatit is that erupts seemingly without cause. After an accident in the laboratory an exhausted



From the film Krakatit (1948)

Prokop tumbles into Prague when he meets Tomes, who takes him into his care.



War with the Newts (Válka s mloky in the original Czech), also translated as War with the Salamanders, was written in 1935. It is a classical anti-utopian novel in which you can find many references to Nazi Germany. The story tells about that man discovers a species of giant, intelligent newts and learns to exploit them so successfully that the newts gain skills and arms enough to challenge man's

place at the top of the animal kingdom. Along the way, Karel Čapek satirizes science, runaway capitalism, fascism, journalism, militarism...

Karel Čapek significantly affected literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His books are read even these days and are known all around the world.