BOOK LAUNCH · MAISEL SYNAGOGUE, PRAGUE

The Inheritance of Silence

In Prague's Maisel Synagogue, Tsuriel Sdomi's The Case of the German Doctor arrives in Czech, and leaves its audience with a question that refuses to be put down.

By **David Silva**, JTS Agency · Prague, 10 November 2026



Beneath the vaults of the Maisel Synagogue, Prague, 10 November 2026. Photo: @j.rhfr by Jakob Rohrhofer

PRAGUE — Some rooms do half the work of a book launch before a single word is spoken. The Maisel Synagogue is one of them. On the evening of 10 November, beneath its tall, pale vaults, a distinguished audience, among them members of the Embassy of Israel and journalists from the press, gathered for what proved to be one of the notable literary evenings of the season: the launch of *Případ německého lékaře*, the Czech edition of Tsuriel Sdomi's *The Case of the German Doctor*, newly published by Práh. It is hard to imagine a more fitting address for a novel about what the past leaves behind in us: a building that has carried the memory of Prague's Jewish community for more than four centuries, in the city where Franz Kafka was born, lived and wrote.

The evening was organised by the Terezín Initiative Institute, the Israel–Czech Republic Friendship Association and JTS Agency Italy. For Amnon Danzig, President of the Friendship Association, the novel is first and foremost a major work of literature, the kind of book that lingers long after the last page. It had returned him, again and again, to questions most of us prefer to leave unexamined, and it was in that spirit that the audience was invited to receive it: not as a story to be consumed, but as a conversation to be continued.

Sdomi himself began where every novel secretly begins: with something true. Years ago, during a concert tour in Germany, he came face to face with a real doctor, and a conversation took place between two men carrying two very different stories. That encounter is the one fact on which the book stands. Everything else, he was careful to say, is fiction. From that single seed grew Dr. Wilhelm von Antrim, a man who has devoted his life to helping survivors, until a secret from his own family comes to light. Villain or saviour? The author declines to choose for us, and that refusal is the book's quiet engine.

> *"That encounter is the one fact on which the book stands. Everything else is fiction."*

What made his talk memorable was the candour with which he opened his workshop. He spoke of where his characters came from, the faces, voices and fragments of lives that went into each of them, and of the strange moment every novelist knows and few admit to: the point at which the characters stopped obeying. From a certain chapter onward, he said, they began to live lives of their own, and he found himself less their author than their witness.



Tsuriel Sdomi: "Everything else is fiction", the true encounter behind the novel. Photo: @j.rhfr by Jakob Rohrhofer

Then, in a city that can hardly hear the name without looking up, he turned to Kafka. Sdomi drew a line between the most famous son of Prague and his own fictional doctor, two men separated by a century and by everything else, yet bound by the same burden: identity. Kafka, a German-speaking Jew in a Czech city, never fully at home in any of the worlds he belonged to; Wilhelm, a healer whose sense of who he is collapses the moment he learns where he comes from. For both, identity is not a possession but a wound, something that shapes a life precisely because it cannot be settled. In that room, the comparison landed with unusual force.

Music threaded through the night not as ornament but as punctuation. The violinist Alexander Schonert played three times, each piece arriving just where words had reached their limit. A performance by the mandolin orchestra Sdomi directed for fourteen years offered a glimpse of the other life that runs beside his writing, and a reminder that this story, too, was born on a concert stage.



Violinist Alexander Schonert, one of three musical interludes of the evening. Photo: @j.rhfr by Jakob Rohrhofer



A reading from the novel held the synagogue in silence. Photo: @j.rhfr by Jakob Rohrhofer

And then the room went still. The passage read aloud belonged to Tekla, the nanny who saves Goldstone, one of the novel's characters. It was, by common consent, the emotional heart of the evening. What reached the audience was not a question of faith or doctrine but something older and plainer: a woman protecting a child as if it were her own. Love for one's neighbour, beyond any religion; a mother's gesture, the kind that no history, however dark, has ever managed to make ordinary.

Sdomi offered no easy consolation in return. Instead, he left three questions hanging in the air of the synagogue, which is perhaps the only honest place to leave them. Can evil be inherited, passed down like eye colour through the blood? What is our responsibility toward the acts committed during the war and in the long years that followed? And what, finally, falls to the generations still to come?

Can evil be inherited, passed down like eye colour through the blood?

It was in closing that the evening found its unexpected coda. Sdomi spoke of Villa Emma in Nonantola, in northern Italy, where dozens of Jewish children were sheltered and saved during the Nazi occupation, and of Nonantola Park, the memorial he created in Rosh HaAyin together with the Italian government in 2020. That story, he revealed, has become his next book, now being written.

If *The Case of the German Doctor* asks whether darkness can be inherited, Villa Emma suggests the other half of the answer: that courage, too, may be a legacy we choose to pass on. The novel now continues its journey to Italy, with presentations in Naples, Venice, Florence, Rome and Pisa in January 2027. On the evidence of this night in Prague, its questions will travel well.

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From left: Tsuriel Sdomi; Ráchel Polohová, Head of Cultural Affairs, Embassy of Israel; and Amnon Danzig, with the Czech edition, *Případ německého lékaře*. Photo: @j.rhfr by Jakob Rohrhofer



The participants of the evening together after the launch at the Maisel Synagogue. Photo: @j.rhfr by Jakob Rohrhofer

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David Silva is a literary agent and Director of Public Relations at JTS Agency Italy · www.jts-agency.com

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