

## **Meeting with the Portuguese writer João Pinto Coelho during the Days of Lusophony at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology**

Students, lecturers and PhD students in the program of Portuguese Philology at the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies met with the Portuguese writer João Pinto Coelho, who joined the online event from Lisbon part of the program of the next edition of the celebrations of the Days of Lusophony. The reason for the meeting was the premiere of the Bulgarian translation of the novel *Ask Sarah* Gross, which is also the first work translated into Bulgarian by the writer.

The opening of the event was carried out by Prof. Yana Andreeva, Head of Portuguese Philology and Coordinator of the Chair "José Saramago" at the Sofia University's Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology (FCMP). Ms Andreeva introduced João Pinto Coelho, giving a brief overview of his novels, with an emphasis on his debut novel, which is now being published in Bulgarian and which she described as a kind of "book against oblivion." The author is an architect by education and teacher of visual arts, and his connection with literature has been strengthened over the last decade, during which he published, in addition to "*Ask Sarah Gross*" (2012), two other successful novels that won the attention of audiences and awards in Portugal.

João Pinto Coelho told Portuguese philology students and professors that although only at a later stage he turned to writing, books have always been a very important part of his life as a child. His first contact with creative writing was motivated by a journey. The experience he gained during his many travels in Europe and North America, as well as the knowledge he gained by studying the history of the Old Continent, in particular the great world conflicts of the twentieth century, shape the themes of his works. "*Ask Sarah Gross*" takes the reader back in time to Poland from the end of the First World War and during the Second World War and to the fate of the Jews in this difficult historical period. According to Joao Pinto Coelho, the success of the novel is due to his in-depth study of the Holocaust. It is this complex topic that ultimately gives life to "*Ask Sarah Gross*". Coelho said that, unlike other writers, "it was not literature that led me to Auschwitz, but Auschwitz that led me to literature". "Without planning to write a novel one day, I knew that if I did, it would be the central theme", he added.

Dimitar Atanasov, a fourth-year student majoring in Portuguese Philology, shared his impressions of the translation process. Dimitar Atanasov thanked the writer both as a reader and as a translator for the trust. He spoke about the many challenges of literary translation that he encountered while working on a text so rich in history and detailed description. According to him, overcoming these challenges brings a sense of satisfaction when the work is done: "After all, this is my first translation. I admit that I faced challenges on every page, but I liked the process."

The participants in the meeting finally expressed the hope for new translations and wished their next meeting to be attended in Sofia, to celebrate together a new Bulgarian premiere of a book by João Pinto Coelho.