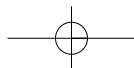
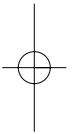
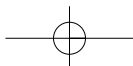
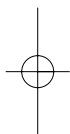
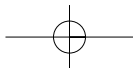
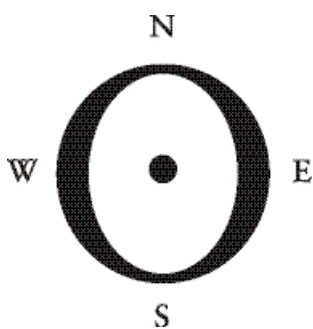
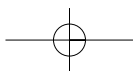


“But poets are the worst.
Their work is hopelessly unphotogenic.
Someone sits at a table or lies on a sofa
while staring motionless at a wall or ceiling.
Once in a while this person writes down
seven lines only to cross out one of them
fifteen minutes later, and then another hour passes,
during which nothing happens...
Who could stand to watch this kind of thing?”

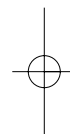
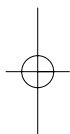
Wisława Szymborska, The Noble lecture



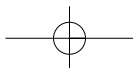


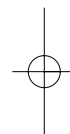
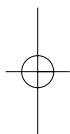
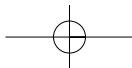


Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators



Under the auspices of
UNESCO



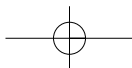


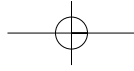
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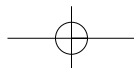
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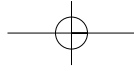




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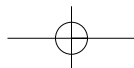


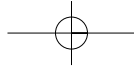


Visions of BCWT

- Stimulate literary and cultural exchange between the countries around the Baltic Sea, and serve as a workplace and meeting point for writers and translators from the Baltic Sea region.
- Actively promote the Centre as a site for cooperative projects, such as seminars, encounters, educational programmes and conferences compatible with the guidelines of the BCWT.
- Support the creation of a reference library compatible with the guidelines of the BCWT, as well as an information database on the literatures of the region.
- Act as a promotor of the formation of cultural policy in the Baltic Sea region.
- Constantly seek new forms and partners for collaboration between writers and translators in the region, prioritising the east-west aspect.
- Contribute to increase knowledge and exchanges between literatures and writers from the countries in the region.

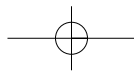
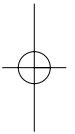
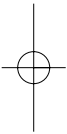
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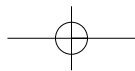
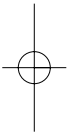
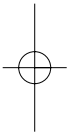
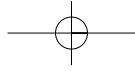


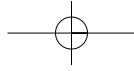


[“The BCWT is important]...
for writer-friendship, writer-solidarity,
and at last but not least to pep up the spirit
in general, giving the deep and gratifying feeling
that the world does care about authors.”

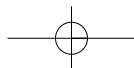
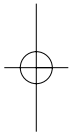
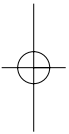
BCWT guest

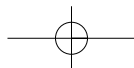
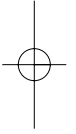
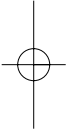
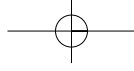


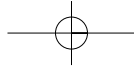




Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators







Foreword

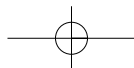
The book you are holding has been put together with the intention to reflect the dynamic multilateral activity of the Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators (BCWT) in Visby on the island of Gotland, as well as to define the sources of its vitality and show how essential it has often proven to be for writers and translators.

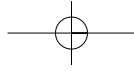
WHAT IS THIS CENTRE? The Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators (BCWT) is an international residential workplace and meeting point for writers and translators. It is today an internationally recognized institution, operating under the auspices of UNESCO. It focuses on multilateral literary activity and cultural exchange. Since its foundation in 1993, the BCWT has provided accommodation for about 2 600 writers and translators from all over the world. The centre has also arranged 12 annual international poetry festivals, translation workshops, seminars and meetings. The BCWT has hosted some major international conferences some in cooperation with UNESCO. In the EU context, the BCWT has been in the avant-garde in questions concerning the enlargement of the Union, and has been developing longterm east-west cultural exchange.

You will find here an outline by Peter Curman, who was chairman of the Swedish Writers' Union when the Centre was founded; he is a visionary, an initiator and a fiery spirit who has continually supported the Centre and been its ambassador, and here he remembers how it all started. Johan Öberg, journalist, editor, scholar and Sweden's former cultural attaché in Moscow, analyses and evaluates the first decennium of the Centre's activity. Writers Hanne Ørstavik (Norway), Eva Runefelt (Sweden) and Kjell Westö (Finland) reflect on the very essence of the Centre – being a home for literary creation, a writers' and translators' workshop, a retreat and a place for significant encounters and learning.

Visby, July 2005

Lena Pasternak





A haven for meetings, creation and free thought

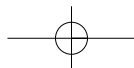
How it all started

To visit the Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators on Gotland is still to climb on board that Russian ship – Konstantin Simonov – that took us all around the Baltic Sea in the historical year of 1992. We were some 300 writers and translators, booksellers and publishers that for two weeks decided to become seamen in order to get to know each other and recover what war and totalitarian politics had stolen from us. On board the ship we held seminars on poetry and cooperation and in the harbours we had readings for the public in city halls and theatres. It was fantastic to hear so many voices and languages! For decades an ugly political fog had prevented us from seeing and meeting each other. Our common sea had been a locked door. Only the fish could swim without restrictions from one side of the sea to the other. Now, in this historical moment, we all wanted to share the freedom of fish! Our Baltic Sea should unite us and not keep us apart!

But what made all this happen? How could more than 300 writers from the Baltic Sea countries suddenly organize themselves and rent a big ship – not only in their dreams but in reality? My answer is: it was history itself that took us on board this Russian ship; we were indeed hitchhiking with history!

Truth is seldom where you want it to be, and it is often paradoxical. My first memory of the very idea of a writers' cruise dates back to 1988. As chairman of the Swedish Writers' Union I was invited to the Writers Union of the German Democratic Republic (i.e. East Germany) to sign an agreement on literary exchange between our countries. But as some writers were not permitted to take part in the proposed exchange, I refused. We could simply not sign an agreement with a writers union that did not respect freedom of speech. We had a very sad farewell dinner in Berlin my last evening.

–Why did you come here all the way from Sweden just to refuse our

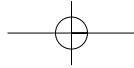


offer? We live around the same sea! We should not fight each other but cooperate! Why don't we meet on a ship for a cruise and get to know each other? These inspiring words were uttered by the union's secretary Gerhard Henninger. For him it was perhaps a dream in his wine glass but to me it was a brilliant idea. When I came home I wrote a letter to him asking him to take an initiative. No response. The idea was much too crazy or premature.

But I could not forget. Next year came the turning point of history: in 1989 the Berlin Wall fell, and the Baltic states liberated themselves. Anything was now possible. In Moscow I met with the chairman of the Writers' Union of Leningrad at the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Boris Pasternak. I brought up the idea of a Baltic cruise, and chairman Vladimir Arro immediately agreed.

Back in Leningrad he took the initiative to the first international meeting with the writers unions in the countries around the Baltic sea to discuss how to realize this project. Also the Mayor of Leningrad, Anatolij Sobjak, gave his full support. But history again intervened: a group of officers revolted against Gorbachev and locked him into his house by the Black Sea. Was the old Soviet Union coming back? But the crises ended with the breakthrough for the fragile new democracy and Boris Jeltsin declared the birth of a new era standing on an army tank outside the White House in Moscow.

On the 25th of February 1992 "Konstantin Simonov" pulled out from the harbour of the former city of Leningrad, soon renamed Saint Petersburg, for a cruise that lasted for two weeks. On its way round the shores of the Baltic sea the ship visited the harbours of Tallinn, Gdansk, Lübeck, Copenhagen, Visby, Stockholm and Helsinki before it returned back home. The cruise was the result of the impressing will and energy of a great number of decisive individuals and the good will of some politicians who understood us. I have mentioned Anatolij Sobjak but I can also name Mats Hellström, today the Governor of Stockholm but in 1992 Minister of Baltic Affairs in our government. Also the Swedish representative in Ars Baltica, Göran Löfdahl, did a great job to secure our budget. Many private sponsors in Russia, among them Mrs. Ludmila Putina, made important contributions to finance the cruise. However, there is one person whose name will always be associated with international writers' cruises, both the one in the Baltic Sea and the following cruise that took place in the Black Sea and the

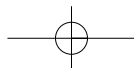


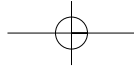
Aegean in 1994. Her name is Ewa Kumlin, a lady with an iron will, and the tenacity of a super diesel engine; she was the driving force of our projects! Thanks to her efforts, we managed to find all the sponsors and supporters that we needed to convert our dreams into reality. Finally, we should never forget the Governor of Gotland, Thorsten Andersson, who invited us to continue our Baltic cruise ashore on Gotland. Thanks to his and his compatriots' efficiency – and among them I remember the local writer Clas Engström who totally convinced us to accept the offer – we found the beautiful site that was inaugurated in 1993 by the Swedish minister of culture and named the Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators.

The importance of the Centre can not be overestimated. It has also become the model for other similar centres in Europe and elsewhere. In 1994 a new writers' cruise was organized in the Black Sea and the Aegean that resulted in The Centre of Three Seas on the Greek island of Rhodes. These two institutions are genuine international centres and operate therefore under the patronage of UNESCO. It is important to stress that the centres do not differ between writers and translators since they belong to the same literary family. The Baltic Centre has also played an important role for the peaceful development in our region and has become an international haven for meetings, creation and free thought.

Stockholm, 14 March 2005

Peter Curman





Projects 1994–2003

1994

June 2–5

INTERNATIONAL POETRY FESTIVAL: “ÖSTERSJÖAR” with Tomas Tranströmer and his friends.

August 25–31

RUSSIAN-SWEDISH TRANSLATORS' SEMINAR. 20 participants from Sweden, St. Petersburg and Moscow in collaboration with the Swedish Embassy in Moscow and the Swedish Institute.

November 13–23

THE BLACK AND AEGEAN SEA CRUISE – THREE SEAS MEETING.

The Black Sea Cruise took place during ten days and went from Athens to Odessa and back to Athens with 400 writers and translators from 30 countries. The BCWT played a central role. The Cruise resulted in the Delphi Declaration and a catalogue, Word Renaissance, where Gotland is strongly represented.

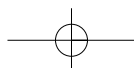
November 22–26

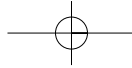
CONFERENCE CULTURAL JOURNALS AROUND THE BALTIC. 30 participants from the entire region. Financed within Ars Baltica.

1995

January 28–30

MEETINGS OF IMAGES. A seminar with 20 children's books' illustrators and animators from the Baltic region in collaboration with the Film Programme on Gotland, the Art Museum of Gotland and the County Library. Financed by the Swedish Institute.



**April 27–30**

NORDIC WRITERS' COUNCIL'S MEETING. 35 representatives from the writers' and translators' unions of the Nordic countries.

May 11–14

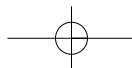
CULTURAL LINKS BETWEEN ISLANDS. Greek Days at the Centre with guests from Rhodes and Athens, headed by the Mayor of Rhodes Mr. George Giannopoulos and the Greek Ambassador of Sweden Mr. Emmanuel Kalpadakis. Professor Sture Linnér and other members of the Swedish-Greek Cultural Association were also invited and so were 12 Greek and Swedish poets. Peter Curman was as usual the driving force in the meeting. A Greek evening was arranged at the Centre, a poetry reading at the Art Museum and many contacts between Gotlandic and Greek authorities and institutions. The intention was mainly to give the Greek delegation the inspiration for a "Sister Centre" on Rhodes, and to investigate a possible interest in future cultural exchange and cooperation.

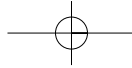
June 11–14

THE 2ND INTERNATIONAL POETRY FESTIVAL: "From Bellman to Bellman". 35 participants: poets, troubadours, translators, and Bellman experts from the Baltic region. Seven poetry readings around the island, for instance on the island of Fårö, at Bläse Limestone Museum, Kapitelhusgården and Frimurarhuset in Visby. A documentation about the festival was published.

August 16–21

SECOND RUSSIAN – SWEDISH TRANSLATORS' SEMINAR IN VISBY. Arranged by Lars Kleberg and Lars-Erik Blomqvist and financed by the Swedish Institute. The special theme of the seminar was the translation of drama. Guest lecturers were Viktor Slavkin, Moscow, and Clas Zilliacus, Åbo Akademi. Participants: Magnus Dahnberg, Per Enerud, Jerker Nilsson, Martina Qvick and Åsa Wikström from Sweden. From Russia: Alexandra Afinogenova, Maria Chochkova, Jevgenij Glucharjov, Julia Gronskaja, Anna Savitskaja and Tatjana Tjesnokova. Altogether 15 persons.



**August 15–22**

DANISH WEEK ON GOTLAND. In cooperation with the Library and Danish Literature Information Office three Danish poets, Katrine Mari Guldager, Naja Marie Aidt and Knud Sørensen, were invited.

October 19–20

THE 3RD BALTIC WRITERS' COUNCIL MEETING ON GOTLAND. Sponsored by the Swedish Institute with 30 participants, representing the Writers' and Translators' organisations of the entire Baltic region.

November 18–24

SWEDISH – GREEK – ALBANIAN MEETING. A unique meeting dedicated to informal and positive discussions about the necessity to develop cultural exchange and to fight violence and national prejudices with words. Gotland and the Baltic Centre was an ideal setting for this, with the friendly atmosphere in spite of old political conflicts. The writers also participated in a reading in Hemse library together with the other visiting poets at the Centre.

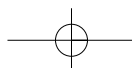
Participants: Thanassis Valtinos (Greece), Athena Papadaki (Greece), Mimis Zouliotis (Greece), Xhevahir Spahiu (Albania), Betim Muco (Albania), Bardyl Londo (Albania), Peter Curman (Sweden), Lars-Erik Blomqvist (Sweden), Mats Löfgren (Sweden). Arranged by the Swedish Writers' Union.

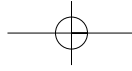
1996

May 3–5

CONFERENCE: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION - INFORMATION - LIBRARIES.

The conference was a collaboration between the BCWT, the Municipality of Gotland and the Union of the Baltic Cities. It was sponsored by the Swedish Institute and the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs. Some 70 people, mostly librarians, politicians, journalists and writers from the whole region came to the Conference, which was opened by Swedish Deputy Foreign Minister Pierre Schori and took place at the same time as the Baltic Sea States Summit. Among the participating writers were Jaan Kaplinski (Estonia),





Knuts Skujenieks (Latvia), Laimantas Jonysus (Lithuania), Peter Curman (Sweden) and Arne Ruth (Sweden).

June 13–16

3RD INTERNATIONAL POETRY FESTIVAL ON GOTLAND. 30 poets and translators participated. 7 readings were held. Among the participants were Viktor Krivulin (Russia), Sigitas Geda (Lithuania), Doris Kareva (Estonia), Guntars Godiņš (Latvia), Nijolė Miliauskaitė (Lithuania), Bronislav Maj (Poland), Bo Carpelan (Finland), Steinunn Sigurdardóttir (Iceland), Ileana Malancioiu (Romania), Blaga Dimitrova (Bulgaria), Marie Lundquist, Anders Bodegård, Juris Kronbergs, Kjell Espmark, Per Wästberg, Gabriela Melinescu and Ulla Roseen (Sweden).

Financed by the Swedish Academy, the Swedish Institute, De Badande Wännerna etc.

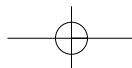
September 1-5

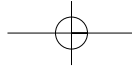
SEMINAR: WRITING FOR CINEMA. The seminar was a collaboration with Elisabet Edlund, Film on Gotland, and financed by the Swedish Institute. Participants: Maciej Karpinski, Poland, Andrius Siusa and Inesa Kurklietytė, Lithuania, Lauris Gundars and Victors Freibergs, Latvia, Peter Urbla, Estonia, Claas Danielsson, Germany, Sonja Vesterholt, Baltic Media Centre Bornholm, and Dag Andersson, Finland. From Sweden participated: Magnus Nilsson, Per Olov Enquist, Kjell Åke Andersson and Kjell Sundstedt.

October 16-18

ARS BALTICA: La Presence Balte in Paris at the Swedish Cultural Centre and Parvis Poetiques. The project was a collaboration between the Swedish Institute, CCS, UNESCO and the Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators (the literary part).

The purpose of this happening was to introduce the cultural aspects of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on Swedish ground in Paris. The participating writers were: Vizma Belsevica and Knuts Skujenieks, Latvia, Marcelijus Martinaitis, Nijolė Miliauskaitė and Judita Vaiciunaitė, Lithuania, Tõnu Õnnepalu (Emil Tode), and Doris Kareva, Estonia. From Sweden Anders Bodegård, Magnus Florin and Marie Lundquist. The Polish poet Adam Zagajewski also participated in a reading.





1997

April 26

THE INAUGURATION OF THE EXHIBITION "Tree Gods from Lithuania" at the Museum of Art in Visby – a result of cooperation with the Centre. Lithuanian ambassador Romualdas Kolonaitis and representatives from the Museum in Kaunas, Mrs. Ugnė Karvelis, writer and Lithuania's ambassador at UNESCO in Paris as well as singer Veronica Pavilionienė were present. The project was financed by the Swedish Institute.

May 12–18

The Centre invited Mrs Irina Gardenina from Moscow, the widow of Ture Eriksson – a writer born on Fårö. Mrs Gardenina had three evenings, of which one at the Centre, when she talked about her late husband and about memories from the fifties. The project was financed by the Swedish Institute and the Gotland County Administration.

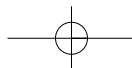
August 21–24

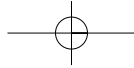
4TH INTERNATIONAL POETRY FESTIVAL: Poets and Translators met on Gotland. Five public readings all over Gotland financed by Swedish Institute, Swedish Academy, DBW, National Council for Cultural Affairs and Gotlandslinjen.

Participants: Eugenijus Alisanka (Lithuania), Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke (Greece), Bengt Berg (Sweden), Denisa Comanescu (Rumania), Peter Curman (Sweden), Kent Danielsson (Åland), Manana Dumbadze (Georgia), Jarkko Laine (Finland), Liisi Ojamaa (Estonia), Vasilios Papageorgiou (Sweden), Sigurdur Pálsson (Iceland), Eva Runefelt (Sweden), Olga Sedakova (Russia), Dan Shafran (Sweden), Lena Nylén (Sweden) and music group *Meraklides* (Sweden).

August 25–September 2

RUSSIAN – SWEDISH TRANSLATORS' SEMINAR. Led by Juliana Jachnina, with 15 young translators from Moscow working together during a week. Magnus Dahnberg from the Swedish Embassy in Moscow also took part in the seminar. The Swedish Embassy in Moscow and the Swedish Institute financed the project which aimed to train young and skilful translators for the future.



**November 28–December 1**

GERMAN – SWEDISH TRANSLATORS' SEMINAR. 7 participants from each country. Helga Krook and Klaus-Jürgen Liedtke were leading the seminar. Financed by Swedish Writers's Fund, Gothe Institute and the Swedish Institute.

Participants from Germany: Paul Berf, Hedwig M. Binder, Regine Elsässer, Klaus-Jürgen Liedtke, Richard Pietrass and Verena Reichel.

Participants from Sweden: Jens Christian Brandt, Peter Handberg, Helga Krook, Marie Lundqvist, Aimée Delblanc and Ulrika Wallenström.

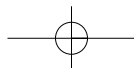
December 5–7

SEMINAR: BALTIC RUSSIAN LITERATURE AND PUBLISHING TODAY. About the present situation of literature in Russian language in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The seminar also discussed the publishing situation, literary magazines, translations etc. Each country was represented by 2 authors/editors. The seminar was led by Swedish-Russian translator Lars-Erik Blomqvist and organized by the the BCWT and the Swedish Writers' Union. Financed by SIDA East.

Participants: Svetlan Semenenko (Estonia), Elvira Mihajlova (Estonia), Jurij Abyzov (Latvia), Ljudmila Azarova (Latvia), Vitalij Asovskij (Lithuania), Hans Björkegren and Lena Pasternak (Sweden).

December 6

Finland's 80TH Anniversary was celebrated in Gotland Art Museum. A speech was given by Lars Huldén, writer and professor from Finland about translating Kalevala, as well as Mrs Riitta Swan from the Finnish Embassy in Stockholm. Jonas Lundahl played Finnish music on the piano. The festivity was a cooperation between the Centre, the Museum, Föreningen Norden, the Finnish Consul on Gotland Mr Magnus Wiman and the local Finnish Association. Some seventy persons came to the solemn happening, which was sponsored by Nordkalk and the Swedish Embassy in Helsinki.



1998

May 8–10

SYMPOSIUM: FEMALE/MALE: GENDER IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE.

In cooperation with the Swedish Institute for Children's Books and County Administration on Gotland. The Symposium was financed with funds from Nordisk Kulturfond (Nordic Cultural Fund) and the Swedish Institute.

Around 25 scholars, writers, librarians etc. from the three Nordic countries Norway, Finland and Sweden as well as from the three Baltic states Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania participated: Rolf Romören, Karin Beate Vold och Gunvor Risa from Norway. Riitta Oittinen och Janina Orlov from Finland. Ulf Boëthius, Boel Westin, Sonja Svensson, Ulf Stark, Maria Nikolajeva, Eva Söderberg och Marika Andrae from Sweden. Kestutis Urba, Grazina Kaslauskienė, Alma Karosaitė, Liutauras Degesys och Algis Klova from Lithuania. Reet Krusten, Helga Nou och Ädu Neemre from Estonia. Mara Cielena, Anita Paegle och Silvija Tretjakova from Latvia.

The given lectures were edited as articles and published by the BCWT in a book form in Print-on-Demand: *Female/Male: Gender in Children's Literature*.

August 21–22

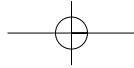
5TH INTERNATIONAL POETRY FESTIVAL: POETRY ON G. Readings took place at the Gotland Art Museum, the City Library and Petesgården in Hablingbo.

Participating poets: from Sweden: Folke Isaksson, Bodil Malmsten, Björn Håkansson, Helga Krook and Björner Torsson. From Finland: Susanne Ringell and Peter Mickwitz. From Russia (St. Petersburg): Alexander Skidan.

1999

March 5–7

BALTIC SEA REGION IDENTITY WORKSHOP. Representatives from literary and media circles met for the second time, with focus on exploring the concept of a Baltic Sea Region Identity. This work was performed in



workshops, seminars, publishing and artistic events. The project aimed to explore, through seminars and publishing the common identity heritage of the Baltic area, especially expressed in literary achievements. In all 15 persons participated.

In cooperation with Baltic Sea Culture Centre in Gdansk, Poland.

July 27–August 2

Turkish and Greek Cypriot artists, poets, film directors met on Gotland. During a week they worked together and established and developed dialogue. Exhibition at the Art School and readings at the BCWT marked with hearted spirit and mutual understanding.

In cooperation with UNESCO and Gotland Art School.

August 1–8

RUSSIAN TRANSLATION WORKSHOP. 15 participants: young translators with Juliana Jahnina as their mentor worked with translation of Swedish fiction during one week. In cooperation with the Swedish Embassy in Moscow and Swedish Institute.

September 23–26

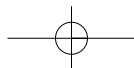
DISARMING HISTORY – REVISITING THE BALKANS: International conference on combatting stereotypes and prejudice in history textbooks of South-East Europe.

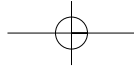
In cooperation with UNESCO and Gotland University College. During four days more than 70 participants, scholars, writers, publishers, politicians from 10 Balkan countries took part in sessions, round tables, panels. UNESCO Director General Federico Mayor och Mr Hernan Crespo Toral attended the conference and visited the BCWT.

August 20–22

6TH POETRY FESTIVAL: REMEMBERING SONJA ÅKESSON. Sonja Åkesson, her poetry and her personality was a leading theme for a seminar, readings, concert, theatre performance. Participants: Birgitta Stenberg, Kristina Lugn, Peter Ortman, Jarl Hammarberg, Eva Lilja, Björn Håkanson, Björn Julén, Gunnar Edander, P.C. Jersild and Ainbuskarna.

Sonja Åkesson Society was founded in connection to the festival. Initiator for the Sonja Åkesson Day were writer/journalist Gunilla Boëthius and publisher Amelia Adamo. On the programme was also a





Finnish-Swedish literary cabaré. Participants: Tua Forsström, Ami Aspelund.

Sponsors: Amelia Adamo, Swedish Academy, De Badande Wännerna, Destination Gotland, Norstedts Publishing House and Gotlands municipality.

Navigare: Text Book No 1.

Selection of prose and poetry based on texts written at the BCWT during the first five years of its existence.

September 16–19

SEMINAR OF NORDIC LITERARY CRITICS. 20 participants among them Merete Mazarella, Steinunn Sigurdardottir, Eva Sjöstrand, Nøste Kendzior. In cooperation with Nordic Journalist Centre and Radio Gotland.

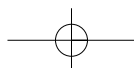
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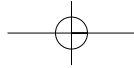
March 31–April 2

PREPARATORY WORKING UNESCO MEETING: The BCWT administrated and conducted this UNESCO working meeting – a preparatory before the conference “*Dialogue between Cultures*” in Vilnius 2001. Among others UNESCO ambassadors from France, Senegal, Iran, Lithuania and chairmen of national UNESCO councils participated.

March 27–April 2

POETRY TRANSLATION WORKSHOP with Sigitas Geda as a guest poet. During a week Swedish, Danish and Finland-Swedish poets were working on the translation of the chosen poems by the Lithuanian poet Sigitas Geda. None of the poets/translators knew the language they translated from. To their help they had two translators between Lithuanian and Swedish. The poet himself was together with the group all the time and helped understanding and interpreting his texts. The BCWT cooperated with the publishing house ARIEL where a bilingual book “*Fallande ängel i Palanga/Angelas krintantis Palangoj*” was published in February 2001. The workshop was organized according to the concept for collective translation of contemporary poetry (developed at the Royaumont-foundation).





Participants: Sigitas Geda, Lithuanian poet, Ulf Eriksson, Swedish poet, also the editor of the coming book, Mikael Nydahl, Swedish translator and publisher from the publishing house ARIEL, Carina Nynäs, Swedish poet from Finland, Casper Udmark, Danish poet and translator, Anna Harrison, translator, Liana Ruokyte, translator, Lena Pasternak, BCWT, project manager. The project was conveyed within the European network for collective translation of poetry.

July 7-14

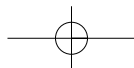
SWEDISH – IRISH POETRY TRANSLATION WORKSHOP. John F. Deane and Jonas Ellerström were working for a week selecting and translating Deane's poems for a planned book of his poetry in Swedish. In cooperation with Ireland Literature Exchange and within the EU network.

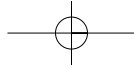
August 18-20

7TH INTERNATIONAL POETRY FESTIVAL: "To build Babel – again and again". Participating poets from eight countries: Inger Christensen, Denmark, Oscar Pastior, Germany, Erling Kittelsen, Norway, Marzanna Bogumila Kielar, Poland, Sigitas Geda, Lithuania, Allan Nilsson, Gotland, Catharina Gripenberg, Finland, Bengt af Klintberg, Sweden, Ulf Eriksson, Sweden and Demosthenes Agrafiotis, Greece. Ilze Purmaliete, Latvia, contributed with songs and music. Readings took place at the County Theatre in Visby, Gotland Art Museum Petesgården and Groddagården. Bengt af Klintberg gave a lecture on folk tales and believes at the Visby City Library.

August 22-27

SPANISH-NORWEGIAN -SWEDISH IN-TRAINING TRANSLATION WORKSHOP. BCWT together with Association of Norwegian Translators and Casa del Traductor in Tarazona (Spain) organized a Training Translation Workshop in which 4 Norwegian translators and 4 Swedish translators worked together translating extracts of novels by the Spanish writers Lorenzo Silva and Antón Castro comparing the stylistic differences and similarities, analysing the modern Spanish language and life. Kirsti Baggethun and Elisabeth Helms led the two groups as mentors. The author Lorenzo Silva and Maite Solana, director of Casa del Traductor, Tarazona took part of the workshop.





November 22–26

POETRY TRANSLATION WORKSHOP: TOMAS TRANSTRÖMER AND HIS FRIENDS. Seven poets/translators from Germany, Russia, Poland, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia and Japan worked together at the Centre with texts by and about the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer. Tomas Tranströmer and his wife Monica took part in the workshop.

As a result a multilingual book, *“Ett drömseminarium”*, was edited by the group and published by the BCWT presenting various interpretations by Tranströmer poems. It also contains texts – memories, poems, essays – in connection to the poet.

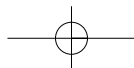
The leader of the workshop was the German translator and poet Richard Pietrass, Berlin. Other participating poets/translators: Alexej Khairetdinov, Russia, Jaan Kaplinski, Estonia, Knuts Skujenieks, Latvia, Leonard Neuger, Sweden/Poland, Milan Richter, Slovakia and Eiko and Christer Duke, Sweden/Japan.

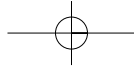
2001

GOTLAND – THE MEETING-PLACE FOR CULTURE. MEET THE AUTHORS OF THE BALTIC REGION! (Kulturmötesplats Gotland: Möt östersjöförfattarna!). Partially financed by the Regional Structural Fund, Objective 2, Islands.

The aims of the project were:

- To strengthen the role of Gotland as an international meetingpoint for culture in the Baltic region.
- To develop international exchanges.
- To create a special library for languages and literature in the Baltic region.
- To find new methods and using new technique for qualified translations and publishing of literature from countries in the Baltic area.
- To create new ways for marketing and profiling the BCWT.
- To develop creative forms of cooperation with Baltic Art Center and Visby International Composers' Centre.



**March 31–April 2**

EU-MEETING: CONDITIONS OF ARTISTS. The BCWT, BAC and VICC were local hosts for this conference during the Swedish presidency of EU.

Literary Access

This project started with a workshop, *“Digital Poetry”*, in cooperation with the GAME-institution at Gotland University College and the IT-company Nomadia. 13 young poets from the Baltic states, Scandinavia, Bulgaria, Greece and Cyprus also participated in the Poetry Festival. The whole project was run for a year in form of translation workshops, cyber poetry and Print-on-demand publishing.

August 24–26

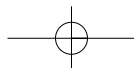
THE 8TH INTERNATIONAL POETRY FESTIVAL: ”FOR WIND AND WAVES – AN INTERNATIONAL POETRY JOURNEY ON GOTLAND”. The 13 poets within the project above as well as Elisabeth Rynell, Ylva Eggehorn Arne Jonsson, Patrik Silvereke and Jon Denman participated in the programme. Places of performance: Warfsholm in Klintehamn, Folkets Hus in Kappelshamn, Hide Kulturbrott, Roma Kungsgård, Majstregården at Hoburgen, Baltic Art Center, and S:t Hans Café in Visby. The whole festival was filmed.

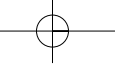
October 11–13

NEIGHBOURHOOD FESTIVAL (GRANNSKAPSFEST). The festival was arranged in cooperation with the Almedal Library/Almedalsbiblioteket, with authors and librarians from the Baltic States and Scandinavia. Readings, panel debates, seminars and formal/informal meetings took place.

November 20–27

TASTE OF PAPER. In this workshop Tomas Butkus, Pablo Lliambias and Olli Heikkonen, engaged in the August programme, compiled and edited an anthology based on the 8th Poetry Festival. The project was documented in the CD-ROM *“Taste of Paper”*. As a result of the young writers meeting an anthology – *“Taste of Paper”* – was published in 2002.





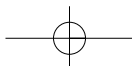
2002

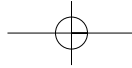
- **GOTLAND, THE MEETINGPLACE FOR CULTURE** from 2001 continues partially financed by the Regional Structural Fund, Objective 2 Islands.
- Development of the library service and the homepage of the Centre by the publishing system imCMS continues.
- Marketing of the Centre and network cooperation.
- Arrangements of seminars, readings and workshops.
- Lithuanian-Swedish, Latvian-Swedish and Russian-Swedish translation workshops in cooperation with the publishing house Ariel.
- Rumanian translation workshop where three young Rumanian translators worked with Agneta Pleijel, Gabriela Melinescu and Inger Johansson.
- Public readings on Gotland.

Literary Access – Culture 2000 project

Partners in the network were International Writers and Translators Centre of Rhodes, Centre for Arts Soros, Bulgaria, Books-on-Demand, Visby and Librairie Desmos Publisher, Paris. Literary Access project aimed to a wider usage of new technique, new ways of publication and distribution as Print-on-Demand and Intenetand to translation workshops.

- Publications in cooperation with Books-on-Demand:
 - “*Taste of Paper*”, an anthology with texts by 13 young authors participating the Poetry Festival in August 2001.
 - “*Allt är väg*”, poems by the Greek poet Janis Tanetzakis, translated by Jan Henrik Swahn and Ann-Margret Mellberg.
- A Bulgarian-Swedish translation workshop.
- A seminar with the saami author John Gustavsen under the Literary Access-theme “*Thinkers from the Peripher*”.
- A workshop in Sofia with participation by the Swedish author Joakim Forsberg. Short stories were published in Bulgarian and Swedish.
- Closing conference in Rhodes. Authors, publishers and cultural administrators participated.





April 1, 2002 – March 31, 2003

NETWORK OF EUROPEAN CENTRES FOR LITERARY TRANSLATORS, RECIT – CULTURE 2000. During April 2002 – March 2003 the BCWT in Visby, British Centre for Literary Translation in Norwich, Association of Irish Translators and Thyrone Guthrie Centre, Annaghmakerrig in Ireland received grants for bursaries and events to develop European cultural exchange.

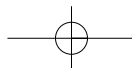
August 23–25

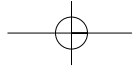
THE 9TH INTERNATIONAL POETRY FESTIVAL. Six readings were arranged at Gotland Art Museum, Almedalsbiblioteket, the library in Klintehamn, Petesgården and Kapitelhusgården. Participating poets and musicians: Cathal O'Searcaigh and Medbh McGuckian from Ireland, Donaldas Kajokas and Vladimir Tarasov from Lithuania, Andres Ehin from Estonia, Pia Dafdrup from Denmark, Marie Silkeberg, Eva Runefelt, Jan Henrik Swahn and Lars Åke Svensson from Sweden.

NETWORK FOR COLLECTIVE POETRY TRANSLATION: As a result of the seminar the book "*Ett drömseminarium*" was published in 2002 containing essays and translations of ten Tomas Tranströmer poems into six languages. (A Culture 2000 project)

Conferences in cooperation held in Visby:

- S:T PETERSBURG AND THE WORLD OF THE BALTIC REGION.
In cooperation with the Swedish Institute.
- CONDITIONS FOR CULTURAL COOPERATION IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION.
In cooperation with Ars Baltica.
- BALTIC-NORDIC TRANSLATION-SEMINAR.
In cooperation with NORDBOK.
- THE LANDSCAPES AND SEASHORES OF THE BALTIC SEA.
In cooperation with Baltic Writers Council, BWC.
- TRANSLATIONS OF TRANSITION.
In cooperation with the Swedish Institute.





2003

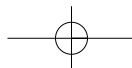
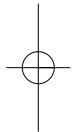
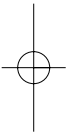
May 23–25

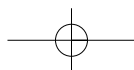
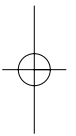
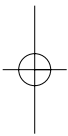
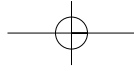
10 YEARS ANNIVERSARY OF BCWT AND 10TH INTERNATIONAL POETRY FESTIVAL. Celebration of the Centre's first decennium. Manifestation of the BCWT with 140 guests from far and near and a festival with readings, retrospective exhibition, audio-stations for public, film production and film show were arranged.

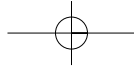
In the poetry festival participated: Tomas Tranströmer, Adam Zagajewski, Tua Forsström, Marzanna Bogumila Kielar, Nora Ikstena, Jan Henrik Swahn and others.

Since 1994 an annual general assembly of the Baltic Writers Council has been held in Visby, organized by the BCWT.

Numerous readings in Visby and all around Gotland were arranged.

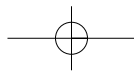
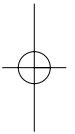
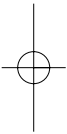


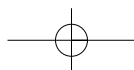
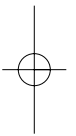
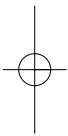
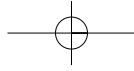


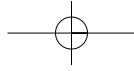


“I spoke to the blackbirds outside the medieval
wall and met Tomas Tranströmer in the library”

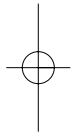
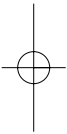
BCWT guest



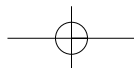


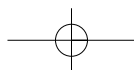
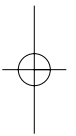
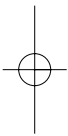
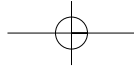


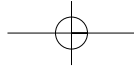
Extract from the evaluation report by Johan Öberg



The evaluation report in full text is available at the BCWT.







Tasks and structure of the evaluation

The task of this evaluation is to describe the role and function of the BCWT over its first decade, 1993–2003. It does not include any evaluation of particular events. The aim is to analyse whether the work of the Centre corresponds to the expectations, resources and demands from guests, and whether it fulfils its main mission, as stated in the visions cited on page 6.

In order to fulfil the task and to obtain up-to-date information, the period of 1999–2002 was selected. The main instrument of knowledge has been a questionnaire with quantifiable and open questions.

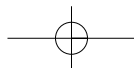
The evaluation opens with a quantitative approach, including a statistical table describing the answers to the main question.

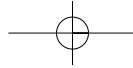
The qualitative evaluation is built on the answers to the open questions in the questionnaire, put together in a patchwork of quotations on different themes.

The evaluation ends with some conclusions and recommendations. In the evaluation work I have been assisted by Gerda Helena Lindskog, former director of the BCWT and by the former deputy director Lena Pasternak, who is now director of the Centre.

Justas Brazauskas, a masters of management student at the Gotland University College, administered the questionnaire.

The English language of this report has been checked by translator Linda Schenck.





Introduction

I first came to Visby in 1994 as a journalist, in order to write about the BCWT. Like most newcomers I was enchanted by the island, the city and the Centre and by its talented director. But I had some doubts as well. The Centre was a part of a flow of events focusing the Baltic Sea in the beginning of the 1990's. That was a hasty flow – after 50 years of stagnation and silence. Maybe too hasty. And would such a place, being the expression of official foreign policy be able to host interesting literary writing and long lasting literary contacts?

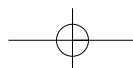
I was mistaken. As I soon realized, the BCWT was, from its very beginning a complex and interesting experiment. Underneath the surface, all that of which I may have suspected the absence, was actually and paradoxically present: a fruitful discussion on culture and politics on the one hand, and quiet literary work on the other.

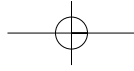
The intentions of the founding fathers and mothers, of those who imagined the Centre during the famous Baltic Waves cruise in 1993 were to continue the intense and conflicting discussions about East-West relations and cultural and literary exchange, using the BCWT as a platform. An island was to replace the ship. That content was supposed to survive in a new, insular form.

But the new institutional conditions seemed to add new qualities to the original project, where creation and mutual trust were to become the basis, and exchange, curiosity, communication and politics the superstructure. The top-down strategy had little by little transformed into something that was more of a bottom-up strategy.

What was, and what is, left of the cruise, is in many ways kept in one of the “mother” organisations of the BCWT – the Baltic Writers' Council, the BWC, created during the “Waves of the Baltic Sea”, whose agenda is more directly to deal with cultural politics in the region.

This is not to say that the Centre hasn't played an active role in the political field or in the field of East-West contacts. On the contrary:





over the years, the Centre has acquired a reputation as a place that can host people, include people with contradictory views and experiences. It has indeed been able to function as a platform for “complicated” meetings of Greeks, Turks, Kurds, Palestinians and recently also of people from the Turkish and the Greek sides of Cyprus.

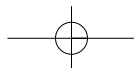
To some extent this nature can be explained by the pluralism in the very foundation of the BCWT: the initiative was collective. The initiators were actually not “Sweden”, but writers from the region, entering the BCWT project with their respective contradictions and differences.

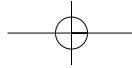
Over the years I have visited the Centre several times. And working for almost six years in the cultural department of the Swedish Embassy in Moscow, I had the privilege of observing the Centre from the East. The reactions of Russian authors and translators were encouraging. Many of those people felt better in Visby than in Stockholm, Frankfurt or Paris. They also stressed the importance of meeting other people, connecting to new cultural spheres, and they felt “confirmed” as people and writers by the interest and admiration from new friends and colleagues. Lots of Russian prose and poetry has been written in Visby over the past decade. This writing deserves an anthology and an analysis of its own.

I realized that the BCWT had become an exemplary “cross border project” with a plural “subject”, where, in equal measure, exchange, respect and creativity were in focus. The management of the BCWT was capable of managing this situation, showing solidarity above all with the community of writers and translators and less with national interests or prejudices. This truly international orientation is still an important component of the “BCWT label” today.

In fact, at the BCWT national identity never plays an important part: the main activity of the management is elaborated as an almost “loving” and very inclusive personal relation to the guests, and a relation to writing and literature characterized by curiosity and competence. The invitation, the unique combination of people was soon left to the responsibility of the management as a very specific form of “artistic” work with no static rules and with two main criteria for the choice of people to invite: literary “quality” and “balance” between East and West, and between authorship and translation.

The way the Centre was managed gradually made it into something

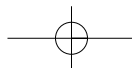


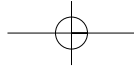


both rare and highly demanded, not only around the Baltic: a place for silent work and creation. This “kernel” of trust in creativity seems to be that which gives the Centre its legitimacy and reputation even today. It is on the basis of this structure of trust and confirmation that projects or new exchanges can constantly be imagined at Visby. Over the years the Centre has become an important “hub” for literary translation and literary contacts, a fact that has been recognized by UNESCO and by the EU. Unofficially, the BCWT today is recognised by many Swedish and foreign publishing houses and editors who address the Centre in order to learn more about the status of literature in a certain country.

In January 2004 I discussed the past decade of the BCWT with Gunilla Forsén, the first director of the Centre, who moved to Riga in 1999 to become the cultural counsellor of the Swedish embassy to Latvia. It is with this Baltic experience in mind she comments on the history of the BCWT: “It was supposed in the beginning that the Visby Centre should become a place where the discussions from the ship could continue. Often conflicting discussions, on culture, politics, ideology, etc. The ship came to Visby, and people said: ‘Here is Visby, let’s continue to talk here, in this privileged place. But very soon you could understand that there was a great need for another kind of Centre: for reflection, creation, individual work. Soon, the Centre became a place for informal meetings between East and West, writers and translators. A sort of balance between those aspects was installed, which made up the real identity of the BCWT. The exterior conditions were excellent: you are on an island. You are cut off. No one demands anything from you. You may sleep and eat when you want to. A silent “common ground” was created: Some kind of basic literary competence was required both from guests and management. Some kind of literary complicity. In the beginning the Centre was very important for many writers and translators from Russia and the Baltic countries. It became the way out. The first contact with other people. We then had solid financing. We could give grants to anyone who needed to come. But after 10 years a renewal is necessary.”

The reflections of Gunilla Forsén are important. She describes the complicated relation between a political project and existential needs at a certain moment in history, when there may have been more resources for this kind of project than now. And one is tempted to add: in a situation when the BCWT “compound” will sooner or later have





to be renovated. But she also points out – as does the board of the BCWT - that maybe another kind of “renewal is necessary”. A new project mask, a new “interface” has to be found.

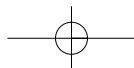
Those two entries into the situation of the BCWT are also mine. A splendid (and isolated) environment for literary creation has carefully been built up in Visby over the last ten years. What once looked like a well-financed project has become an important cultural institution. But who loves institutions in the era of de-modernization? And who wants to pay for something that cannot immediately be shown on television? Or does the BCWT kitchen need to be transformed into “reality TV” in order to attract more financing?

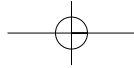
Thus: what kind of “renewal” is necessary in order to save the “core”, the privileged space for literary creation and translation? That is my second “entry”.

Gunilla Forsén continued, from the point of view of her recent Eastern European experience: “But in this renewal we shouldn’t forget that grants are still needed and will be needed. People are still poor. We cannot simply transform the Centre into a Centre for the rich and famous. The core of the BCWT was the Baltic Sea and a balance between East and West, and between translation and writing. This is still relevant. People still want to write. But this structure is difficult to show in the media in order to “sell it”. We shouldn’t sell the Centre to the media. The BCWT must continue to be a secluded – a secret – place. There is a danger in the idea of making the BCWT into a trendy place. We should never try to achieve media success with the help of events. My loyalty is with the creative person. Here people should have a chance to put themselves in order, to hide, to be themselves. Here they should have the opportunity to delve very deep.”

Elsewhere I have tried to analyse the BCWT as an organisation that is financed like a project but which behaves like an institution, and must behave like an institution in order to give the necessary safety, calm and infrastructure to its guests. I think that this analysis is still valid and that the main strategic task of the board today is to root the idea of a need for such a long term institution in the minds of politicians and sponsors. I hope that this document will favour the fulfilment of that task.

Göteborg, March 2004





The Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators – a brief description

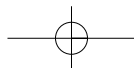
The Visby Centre (or BCWT) is an international residential Centre for writers and literary translators, located in Visby on Gotland, Sweden. The BCWT is a working and meeting place for literary professionals and an important international literary meeting point.

The Centre welcomes applicants from all countries - but priority is given to literary professionals from the countries of the Baltic Sea region and Scandinavia, i.e. Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden.

The BCWT was established in 1993 as a direct result of the writers' cruise around the Baltic Sea. Since 1996, the Centre has worked under the auspices of UNESCO. It is also part of the international network of European translators' Centres. The supporting organization (since 1994) of the BCWT is the Baltic Writers' Council. Thus the BCWT is largely financed by Sweden, whereas the "moral" ownership of the BCWT is multinational.

The BCWT is a non-profit organization. Members of the BCWT are the Swedish Writers' Union, the County Administration of Gotland and the Municipality of Gotland.

The Centre is financed mainly by the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs (1,500,000 SEK per year) and the Gotland Municipality (331,000 SEK per year corresponding to the annual fee for renting the premises from the municipality). Because of increasing costs, and a state subsidy that hasn't changed over the last ten years, the Centre relies more and more on project financing, especially from the European Union. The cooperation with EU structures began in 1996 and has permitted exchanges of experience, publication of books and most importantly, grants for writers and translators from EU countries and candidate countries. In the EU cooperation the BCWT, with its long and fruitful history of literary contacts in the region, represents specific expertise on the cultural and literary situation in the Baltic Sea area, and



the Centre in 2003 was invited to report to the conference “*Books and the book market in the enlarged Europe*” held in Athens under the Greek presidency.

But project financing is always double-edged. An analysis of the economic and administrative situation of the Centre made in 2003 concluded that in order to reduce the relative importance of administrative costs in the budget, to modernise the premises, to continue the building up of the library and to facilitate long term planning of invitations and guests, the Centre needs stable long term financing of 2–2.5 MSEK per year – which is quite a low cost in relation to the great output of the BCWT (app. 3000 guest nights per year, conferences, books, etc).

The BCWT is governed by a board with representatives from the Swedish Writers’ Union, the county of Gotland, the municipality of Gotland and the Baltic Writers’ Council.

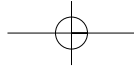
The Baltic Writers’ Council is a multinational, non-profit, non governmental organization open to all writers’ and translators’ unions in the Baltic area (defined as Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden). Every year the Baltic Writers’ Council holds a General Assembly at the BCWT in Visby. In the beginning of the Centre’s history the BWC played an important ideological and supportive role.

The core activity of the BCWT is to provide one-month grants to cover staying at the Centre, for literary workers from all over the world. Preference is given to writers and translators from the Baltic-Nordic region. Formally, the board of the BCWT decides who shall be invited, but most decisions are delegated to the management.

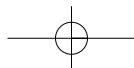
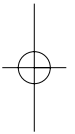
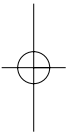
Between 1994 and 2002 the BCWT provided some 1400 writers and translators with some 24,000 guest nights. There are 11 rooms at the Centre, with an average of 9 writers and translators staying at the Centre at the same time.

In order to promote its aims, the Centre also engages in conferences, seminars, translation workshops, book production and poetry festivals. (see “Projects 1994–2003”, page 15).

Over the years, the BCWT has acquired a good reputation among literary workers in many countries. The relative seclusion of the BCWT, which contributes largely to the attraction of the place, is also a part of its problem in “the information age”.



One of the aims of this evaluation is to describe the productivity, creativity, popularity and necessity of the Centre to its users and ideal owners – the authors and translators of the Baltic-Nordic region.



A quantitative approach. The guests at the BCWT 1999–2002

The population

The survey covers the years 1999–2002. During the period there were 664 registered guests at the BCWT. If you add the 31 guests who were not registered individually in the report from the Centre in 1999, and some more who took part in workshops that year, the total number would be nearly 700 people. (see table 1)

500 of those people were actually writers and translators in residence at the Centre – writers or/and translators coming there for a work period of 2–4 weeks.

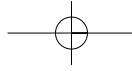
454 of those writers and translators were selected to receive the questionnaire. The selection was made by the directors of the Centre. Exclusions were made for different practical reasons. (see table 3)

1999		Lithuania	12
Denmark	9	Netherlands	1
Estonia	9	Norway	3
Finland	21	Poland	10
France	1	Romania	1
Germany	5	Russia	26
Great Britain	1	Sweden	49 (30.1%)
Greece	1	Total	163)
Iceland	1		
Latvia	13		

Table 1 (Continues)

2000		USA	1
Denmark	8	Total:	197
Estonia	9	2002	
Finland	14	Denmark	14
Germany	15	Estonia	7
Greece	1	Finland	20
Iceland	1	France	1
Latvia	11	Germany	8
Lithuania	10	Great Britain	1
Norway	8	Greece	3
Poland	15	Latvia	13
Russia	5	Lithuania	13
Sweden	13 (11.4%)	Norway	18
USA	1	Poland	1
Spain	2	Romania	5
Slovakia	1	Russia	11
Total	114	Sweden	67 (35.3%)
2001		Bulgaria	1
Denmark	12	Canada	1
Estonia	6	Czech republic	1
Finland	21	Ireland	1
Germany	18	Italy	1
Greece	2	Slovakia	1
Iceland	4	Turkey	1
Latvia	9	USA	1
Lithuania	16	Total:	190
Norway	12	Total for the period:	664
Poland	9		
Romania	1		
Russia	20		
Sweden	58 (29.4%)		
Argentina	1		
Bulgaria	3		
Canada	2		
Cyprus	1		
Slovakia	1		

Table 1

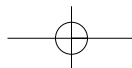


Background

The total number of guests over the period was distributed in the following way with regard to the country of origin. (see table 2)

	Quantity	%
Denmark	43	6.5
Estonia	31	4.7
Finland	76	11.4
France	2	-
Germany	46	6.9
Great Britain	2	-
Greece	5	0.8
Iceland	6	0.9
Latvia	46	6.9
Lithuania	51	7.7
Netherlands	1	-
Norway	41	6.2
Poland	35	5.3
Romania	7	1
Russia	62	9.3
Sweden	187	28.2

Table 2



454 questionnaires were distributed, by post and by e-mail.
The national distribution was as follows over the years 1999–2002.
(see table 3)

Sweden	94	20.7%
Germany	57	12.6%
Russia	57	12.6%
Finland	43	9.5%
Lithuania	39	8.6%
Poland	27	5.9%
Estonia	26	5.7%
Latvia	26	5.7%
Denmark	21	4.6%
Norway	18	3.9%
USA	9	1.8%
Iceland	8	1.7%
Greece	7	1.5%
Netherlands	4	1.6%
Romania	3	1.2%
Great Britain	3	1.2%
France	2	0.4%
Ireland	2	0.4%
Belgium	2	0.4%
Czech republic	1	0.2%
Slovakia	1	0.2%
Canada	1	0.2%
Turkey	1	0.2%
Italy	1	0.2%
Total	454	100%

Table 3

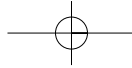
203 answers were received from the 454 addressees. Nationally, this means that from most countries around 50% responded, except from Sweden, Russia, Norway and Poland, where only around one third of the addressees answered the questionnaire. No reminders were sent.

Questionnaires returned	203	100%
Denmark	9	4.4%
Estonia	14	6.9%
Finland	25	12.3%
Iceland	5	2.5%
Latvia	14	6.9%
Lithuania	18	8.9%
Norway	6	2.9%
Poland	9	4.4%
Russia	22	10.8%
Sweden	33	16.3%
Germany	27	13.3%
Other countries	21	10.3%

Table 4

The analysis below concentrates on the answers from the eleven Baltic and Nordic countries, with a total of 182 respondents. This is the population investigated. 182 out of 664 persons (27.4%) is a statistically relevant rate. As the average number of visits to the Centre of each answering guest amounts to 1.7, some of the respondents had two or more stays at the BCWT during the period investigated.

The only actual risk of statistical error – that the respondents who have answered the questionnaire may have been much more positive than the imaginary answers of those who did not respond – has not been checked for systematically. There is no reason to believe that their views would differ greatly from the opinions in the answers that were actually received. The general trend of the answers is very clear.

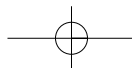


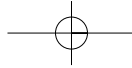
The questionnaire

The questionnaire was constructed in order both to obtain information about persons visiting the Centre – to find out how they learned about the existence of the BCWT, what they were actually working on during their stay, how many times they had stayed at the Centre, how they financed their trip and their stay at the Centre (the accommodation in itself is free of charge). We also asked them their opinions of the services offered at the Centre, the quality of life, their attitudes to social life, to Visby/Gotland, etc. Some of those questions were quantitative, and some were open. An example of an open question, where the answers were especially abundant and interesting is question number 11: “Please tell us some memories of your stay (experiences, contacts, knowledge etc). What was best? What was worst?”. Another open question was “What would you like to see changed at the BCWT?” Another important aspect of the survey is about creativity: what has been written or translated at the Centre.

Questionnaire:

1. *Please provide information about yourself.*
2. *When did you visit the BCWT?*
3. *How long did you stay at the BCWT each time?*
4. *Your travel and living expences were financed by:*
5. *The first information about the BCWT you received from:*
6. *Have you visited similar centres in other countries? If yes, please write the name of the centre.*
7. *Were you sufficiently informed about the practical things?*
8. *How did you like working and living conditions? Please write your comments and suggestions:*
9. *What were you working with during your stay at the BCWT?*

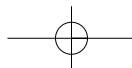




10. *Why is the BCWT an important place for you and your colleagues?*
11. *Please, tell us some memories of your stay (experiences, contacts, knowledge etc). What was the best? What was the worst?*
12. *Did you inform colleagues, press or media about the BCWT after your stay in Visby?*
13. *Have you seen any information about the BCWT in media in your country? If you can, include copies of the articles.*
14. *How well is the BCWT known among writers and translators in your country? How well is it known in public?*
15. *What would you like to change at the BCWT?*

The answers to the questionnaire

The answers to each questionnaire can be consulted after permission from the management in the office of the BCWT. For ethical reasons the identities of the respondents have been kept anonymous in this study. Let us now look at a synoptic presentation of the answers to the quantifiable questions. (see table 5)



**Answers to the main questions in the questionnaire.
A selection of the countries, members of the Baltic Writers' Council**

			Sweden	Germany	Finland	Russia	Lithuania	Latvia	Estonia	Denmark	Poland	Norway	Iceland
NBR OF GUESTS ANSW.	182	100%	33	27	25	22	18	14	14	9	9	6	5
Women	104	57%	26	17	13	12	3	6	8	4	8	4	3
Men	78	43%	7	10	12	10	15	8	6	5	1	2	2
Av. number of visits	1.7	2.5	1.4	2	1.2	1.8	1.6	2	1.7	2.2	1.5	1	
ACTIVITY:	268	100%											
Prose	93	34.7%	10	12	10	10	6	5	8	5	2	3	2
Translation	65	24.3%	6	13	7	8	7	6	6	4	5	2	1
Poetry	47	17.5%	4	7	10	4	10	3	3	1	3	1	1
Essays	24	8.9%	4	5	4	2	4	-	2	-	2	1	-
Children's lit.	16	5.9%	5	-	1	-	2	1	2	1	1	-	3
Criticism	7	2.6%	-	-	-	1	-	-	4	-	1	1	-
Science	5	1.9%	1	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	1	-	-
Theatre Et Opera	5	1.9%	2	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Filmscript	2	0.7%	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Conference	1	0.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Journalism	1	0.3%	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Editing	1	0.3%	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Diary	1	0.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-

Table 5

			Sweden	Germany	Finland	Russia	Lithuania	Latvia	Estonia	Denmark	Poland	Norway	Iceland
FINANCING:	201	100%											
Myself	98	48.8%	23	19	23	4	3	4	2	7	5	4	4
BCWT	92	45.8%	3	12	9	19	17	4	12	5	7	3	
SI	11	5.5%	1	1	-	3	-	1	4	-	1	-	-
Other	21	10.4%	5	2	-	3	1	5	2	-	1	2	4
INFORMATION FROM:	183	100%											
Media	7	3.8%	2	2	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Colleagues	93	50.8%	15	15	12	16	8	10	3	5	4	3	2
BCWT	11	6%	1	-	-	1	1	2	3	2	-	1	-
Writers' & translators' U.	71	38.8%	7	8	16	5	8	4	9	4	6	2	2
VISITED SIMILAR CENTRES	82	45%	10	20	12	7	7	4	6	8	3	2	3
Conditions	VG		VG	G	VG	VG	VG	VG	VG	VG	VG	VG	VG
WHY IMPORTANT	312	100%											
Symbolically	54	17.3%	6	8	10	7	2	5	3	1	5	5	2
Contacts	100	32%	17	23	12	12	7	7	7	5	4	5	1
Concentrated work	158	50.7%	24	26	20	20	18	14	11	7	9	5	4

Table 5

Comments to the table:

1. The activities indicate what each person was actually doing at the Centre, not necessarily his or her usual position or profession. It is possible thus to have more activities than people: there were actually 268 activities and only 182 guests. Correspondingly, the guest may also have been informed about the Centre by both the BCWT and his or her writers' union, and financing can have been arranged by both "myself" and with one or two grants.

2. A more detailed evaluation of living and working conditions is given in table 6 – *Working and living conditions*:

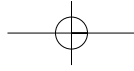
	Norw	Est	Fin	Ger	Icel	Latv	Lith	Denm	Pol	Rus	Swe	Total
Room	4.5	4.8	4.6	4.6	4.4	4.8	5	5	4.7	4.9	4.7	4.7
Comm*	4.2	4.6	3.7	4	3.8	4.6	4.4	4.3	4.6	4.8	4.1	4.3
Kitchen	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.5	4.2	4.9	4.8	4.3	4.6	5	4.3	4.5
Common space	4.6	4.7	4.4	4.3	4.8	5	5	4.5	4.7	4.9	4.4	4.7
Library	4.6	4.3	4.3	4	4.8	4.3	4.2	4.5	4.7	4.3	4.4	4.4
Assistance	4.8	4.8	4.5	4.6	5	4.9	4.8	5	4.8	5	4.7	4.8
Meeting colleg.	5	4.7	3.3	4.3	3.8	4.7	4.7	4.3	4.7	4.7	4.5	4.4
Activities	4.8	4.5	3.8	3.9	4.2	4.5	4.5	4.1	4.6	4.8	4.2	4.4
Gotland	4.5	4.6	3.7	3.7	4.4	4.5	4.2	4.5	4.7	4.8	4.2	4.3
Total	4.6	4.6	4	4.2	4.4	4.7	4.6	4.5	4.7	4.8	4.4	4.5

Scale 1-5

*Telephone, fax, e-mail, Internet

Table 6

3. It should also be noted that the answer to the question "Why is the BCWT an important place for you and your colleagues?" was often more "hierarchical" than can be seen from the statistical table: the respondents often stressed "concentrated work" typographically, by giving it a comparative "number one" status, etc.



Analysis

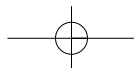
1. Gender

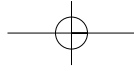
More women than men were responding to the questionnaire and stayed at the Centre over the period. Among the 454 recipients of the questionnaire, there were 241 women and 213 men (53% vs 47%). This means that female dominance was less pronounced in the original population, and that women responded more frequently than men (57% women, 43% men). At the extremes are Sweden with 26 female respondents and 7 male respondents and Lithuania with 3 female and 15 male respondents. It is a perhaps not completely irrelevant conclusion, or a topic for further discussion, that for different reasons, among them social, literary women “need” the Centre more than literary men do.

2. Writers and translators

The Centre works with translators as well as writers. Translation activity seems to be somewhat less represented than authorship of different kinds. There are 65 translating “activities” compared to 203 authorial “activities” reported in the answers. Those numbers must also be compared to the list of actual productions being realized at the Centre, where 74 translations are mentioned and 125 authorial works of different lengths (a poem, a collection of poems, an essay, a libretto, a novel). This situation has a long history at the BCWT: from the very beginning, translators had to be encouraged to come, in order to create a balance between translators and authors.

Quantifying literary work in this way is not a very gratifying occupation! The only conclusion to be drawn here may be a modest warning: the position of the translators must be, and has over the years been, defended by the management and the board of the Centre. A quick look at the series of events and seminars arranged by the BCWT indicates that the importance of translation is very much stressed.





3. Genres

The BCWT is primarily a prose Centre, where prose (93 activities) rather than poetry (47 activities) is produced. Authors and poets of great esteem have worked at the Centre. Perhaps the Visby poetry festival should also be a prose and essay festival, if such a festival were possible to imagine?

The relatively high rate of essay writing at the Centre should be noted (8.9%). This is a deeply rooted genre in some of the countries represented, but with a somewhat weaker position in the Nordic countries (with the exception of Finland). Essay writing and meetings around essay themes could thus be encouraged even more at the BCWT. This is a genre that would suit the interests of those who insist on renewal of the BCWT in a way that would be a challenge to the new socio-political situation in Europe and the world after September 11, 2001.

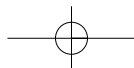
The relatively low frequency of work on children's literature (5.9%) may be astonishing to some readers. This also requires analysis and some kind of reaction from the management.

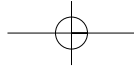
4. Money

Almost 50% of the respondents financed their travel and their expenses when staying at the Centre themselves, partly or totally. The largest individual contributions were made by individuals from Sweden, Germany and Finland. According to the answers received, the Swedish Institute appears not to use the BCWT to any great extent to encourage translation of Swedish literature into foreign languages. This situation should be analysed. It may be the result of a misunderstanding on the part of the respondents. Behind a BCWT grant, there may be a hidden SI-grant. Germans and Estonians seem to be especially keen on finding financing from foundations in their own countries, whereas Russians and Lithuanians rely firmly on support from the BCWT in order to be able to come to the Centre. In order to maintain Eastern European participation, grants will be necessary for many years ahead.

5. Information about the BCWT

The most important source of "reliable" information about the Centre was "colleagues", followed by different associations for writers and translators. It is especially important to do "literary networking" for the





BCWT in those countries where the level of trust in organisations – “social capital” of any kind – is particularly scarce, in order to avoid monopolization of information about the Centre. Public media seem to have almost no importance, and the efforts of the BCWT to inform writers and translators directly doesn’t seem to have had any special effects. Keeping up a steadily renewed network of “fellows” of the Centre seems to be the most effective information strategy.

6. Living and working conditions

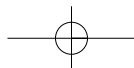
The overall impression is immensely positive, and the statistical evaluation is confirmed by the open answers to the qualitative questions. The data from Table 6 give 4.5 points out of 5 as an average “grade” for living and working conditions.

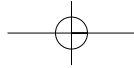
7. The importance of the BCWT to the respondents

Slightly more than 50% are of the opinion that the possibility of doing “concentrated work” is the most important function of the Centre. It should be repeated that the respondents often stress this factor typographically, with numbers etc. Concentrated work could thus be considered to be the “meaning”, the “basis” or the primary function of the BCWT. It is the condition sine qua other functions cannot be guaranteed, and the basis for other positive values assigned to one’s stay at the BCWT, in Visby, in Sweden or in other imaginable “framings”. The connection of working conditions and creation to contacts and landscape/cityscape and “projects” are repeated in different themes throughout the answers to the open questions.

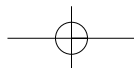
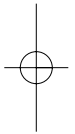
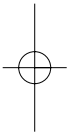
8. The identity of the visitors of the BCWT as a statistical construct

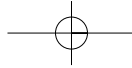
The Centre has been used more by women than by men, and by authors more than translators. Schematically, my conclusion is that Swedish “writing women” is the biggest group represented at the BCWT (although the high score for Polish women is even more extreme). Swedish visitors also have the highest rate of second and more visits.





COMMENT: Without the subsidies and grants, the domination of the Nordic countries and Germany would doubtless become even stronger, perhaps with the exception of Estonia, which has a higher frequency of self financed visits than the other Baltic countries and Russia. Without the subsidies, the “Baltic cultural exchange function” of the BCWT would be much weaker, and the initial identity and “meaning” of the Centre, which is safeguarded as a meaningful kernel within the ideology of the BCWT, would fade away. The Centre would become an ordinary Centre for well-off writers and translators from Western Europe and the US (which already accounted for 9 visits during the study period). Authors and translators from other parts of the world have always been important, but never dominant.





“The place, the view, the calm” The users of the Centre

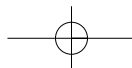
An analysis of the answers to the open questions in the questionnaire

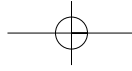
The questionnaire contained a few open questions. One of them – “Please, tell us some memories of your stay (experiences, contacts, knowledge etc). What was best? What was worst?” – received many answers which, put together, could form a little anthology about the BCWT. Those answers often repeat what you can read in the “guest reports” to the Centre. Nevertheless – answering a questionnaire is different from sending a letter of gratitude. What is fascinating is that the same positive tone, on this occasion characterises both “genres”.

As the answers were to be returned to the management of the BCWT a reader might also suspect that the respondents were positive in their evaluations because they hoped to be able to return for another stay. But even if this was the case in some instances – their desire to come back does not seem to “falsify”, but rather to confirm, that their view of the BCWT really is a positive one. Otherwise they would not have wanted to return.

Comments on the atmosphere and the mix of people

Guests and visitors to the BCWT are generally impressed by the particular mix of people who gather there. Usually around nine people are staying at the Centre at one time. The group is continuously renewed but the composition remains in many ways constant. One or two people from Estonia-Latvia-Lithuania, a few people from Poland, Denmark, Norway or Iceland, one German, one Russian, one Swede and a couple of people from “the rest of the world” (the UK, France, Greece or Romania, for example). In the group there are translators, poets, prose writers and specialists in some literary field. There are more authors than translators, but still a sufficient number of people who can function as linguistic mediators and moderators. This mix makes the communicative situation excellent.



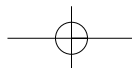


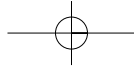
The Visby Centre does not, according to the answers, encourage “competition”, but a low key, warm, unaffected and respectful dialogue, where no one is excluded and no one is forced to take part. An Icelandic author stressed: *“You have no feeling of competition here. People who do the same thing usually can’t listen to each other – but here you pay attention to other people’s writing. The situation never becomes egocentric. The place is very inclusive”*.

And there is also a positive attitude to the mix of translators and writers in several answers. A German translator comments: *“I find it very good that the BCWT, as opposed to the Übersetzerkollegium (Straelen) accepts both translators and writers. For me it was an opportunity to meet both writers and translators from the Scandinavian countries. There were many interesting conversations in the kitchen. Also the meetings with writers and translators from Eastern Europe were very interesting...”*

The professional and national mix is supplemented with a mix of another kind. At the BCWT there is often a mix of the “rich and famous”, established and published, and poorer newcomers, working here on their first or second book. But when people enter the Centre, meet in the kitchen or listen to each other reading new texts, the difference in status doesn’t seem to be of any greater importance, as a strange sort of equality is established and sustained by both guests and management.

The important role of the management in creating the atmosphere of curiosity, tolerance and freedom is stressed in almost all the answers to the questionnaires. One German prose writers of the younger generation formulates the role of the management in the following way: *“I experienced the atmosphere in the Baltic Centre as marvellous. The contact between the authors and translators was all the time friendly, cooperative and harmonious. I continued contacts and friendships after my stay in summer. In the next year I have for example planned a reading together with my Danish colleagues Lone Horslev-Rasmussen and Martin Glatz-Serup in Copenhagen. My impression of the directors of the Baltic Centre is that they are capable of exerting something rare to find which I would call ‘indirect authority’”. The application for the scholarship as well as the stay itself function with amazingly little bureaucratic means. In the Baltic Centre daily questions like using bikes or kitchen tools are successfully being dealt with in very humane, uncomplicated ways, which never reminded me of the many orders and restrictions of other comparable places.”*





A Swedish comment of the same kind: *“Nice independence and responsibility – you can do as much as you wish – clean the kitchen, do your laundry, borrow a bike or a car.”*

This way of sharing everyday life seems to create a good climate for literary creativity: *There is always someone to talk to* (if no writers or translators are at hand, the well qualified management is). When you interview the guests this seems to be one of the most generally shared evaluations about the BCWT.

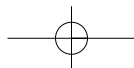
A Finnish translator comments: *“Everyone respected each other’s inspiration, but we were nevertheless keen on social contacts”*. And a Finnish prose writer put it in the following way: *“The best part was the relaxed but still serious atmosphere, people were nice and social, and showed respect for each others work”*.

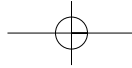
But there are also a few rejections of the climate at the Centre, like the following one, from a Swedish prose writer: *“I felt pressure to join in social activities (and disappointment from the others when I didn’t). I was there mainly to get my work done.”*

One voice, that of an important Lithuanian philosopher, distinguishes itself from this almost unanimous discourse of harmony, tolerance and happiness. As an answer to the question what he would like to change at the Centre, the answer comes like this: *“If I were you, I would consider some candidates from among noted literary scholars, social and cultural critics/essayists, and literary philosophers, instead of focusing exclusively on writers and translators. This would be a great benefit for the writers and translators themselves.”*

It is an interesting experiment to think hypothetically about what would happen if literary critics, social thinkers and philosophers were admitted to the “Moscow kitchen” of the BCWT. But this comment of the distinguished thinker accords with the relatively high interest in essay writing among the guests of 1999–2002, and could correspond to an eventual need for renewal of the themes of the literary meetings at the Centre.

In the few cases where the BCWT gets negative criticism from its users, in which statements everything is really bad, it seems that the critique stems either from loneliness or the impossibility of communicating with the others, some lack of organized social activities, or a feeling that there is too much socializing and it can be difficult to say no. It is my impression that it may be very difficult to





reconcile the extreme need for solitude with the extreme need for sociability.

A place for creativity and production

A Norwegian writer comments: *“BCWT is the best place to come if you want to write and keep a focus on writing. Last autumn (at the BCWT) was the best writing period I have had for a long time, and I hope it resulted in a (new) approach to language, literarity, that wouldn’t have taken place, at least not as fast as it did, without this stay. (...) It is a place where you are free, and at the same time extremely concentrated on what is most important: writing. To meet others, to work in an explicit or unexplicit community of writing, with people from all the Baltic countries is highly informative and motivating. You meet people here, but you also meet writing, in all its forms and expressions.”*

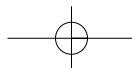
A Swedish prose writer adds: *“It’s an excellent place for work. For me it is really perfect and there is almost nothing that I’d like to add, except for some sharp knives in the kitchen (...). I like that there are no telephones in the rooms (...) the whole atmosphere inspires you to work”.*

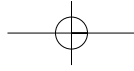
A Swedish poet comments: *“...this is one of the few places where it is possible to work, read, calm down and be intensely active at the same time – you just have to choose your own way, and that is deeply respected from the world around you. For me this is the only place, if I want to start a project or finish it. AND to do the rest in between.”* Another Swedish author stresses *“the good and understanding feeling”*. This is the prevailing evaluation.

A Polish writer comments: *“I didn’t think that it was possible to work as much as I did in Visby. I wrote eleven stories, and essays and poems, inspired mostly by the place. I wrote here so much and such unusual texts, as I had never expected. Here I got peace and space for concentration and a possibility to be in contact with other writers, strong and interesting individualities. I could be alone and yet I was not (...)”* And a comment from a German translator says the same: *“I have rarely been able to work with the same intensity as during my stay at your Centre”.*

This is also the impression when you meet and interview the guests at the Centre: they are welcoming and ready to include new people and to express themselves in an easygoing way.

An Estonian poet and a writer of children books expressed it like this in the questionnaire, as a comment to the question: “Is there something that you would like to change?” *“No, the only thing I would like to*





change is my timetable, because it seems to me that in Gotland I could write the book I have long been dreaming of. It seems to me that in the BCWT I could be just as lonely as necessary for writing in peace, but not too lonely at the same time”.

And a Lithuanian poet, translator and librettist, adds: *“Everything was just wonderful – can’t remember a better time and opportunity for my creative work (...) Being isolated and among your colleagues at the same time. Very special atmosphere in the house. Our work during the day, our long talks at night at the kitchen table with candles (...)”.*

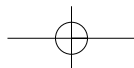
Its character of literary retreat, of monastery, has been pronounced by some of those who answered the questionnaire or took part in the interviews. As an Estonian writer and essayist states in his answer: *“It is one of the nicest places for a writer I have ever seen”.* And a Finnish translator specifies: *“The best experience in the Centre is the atmosphere of a ‘literary monastery’.* As a Finnish writer put it when being there in 1998: *“a devoted community of believers, who like monks, disappear to their cells in order to appear back to the daylight in the mealtimes”.* This metaphor of darkness and daylight is interesting in itself. And a Lithuanian poet adds: *“Simply – the best place for serious work”.*

Changing identity step by step?

Which are the actual relations between the cultural ideology and the need for “retreat” and inclusive tolerance? Many people who have followed the Centre since its creation figure a sort of change to the continuity. The beginning coincided with, and was enabled by, the fall of the iron curtain. This was also the time of the now almost mythological writers’ cruise known as “Waves of the Baltic Sea”.

The initial impulse thus was to take part in creating a new cultural world order. The BCWT became an important cultural stronghold from which you could reach/get hold of new ideas and “connect” to global cultural structures. The Baltic was a highway out to the Seven Seas. It was in this specific political context that the aims/visions of the BCWT were formulated.

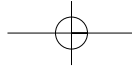
But over the years, the Centre has developed a somewhat new role. The “big projects” suggested have been more and more replaced by individualistic strategies. As international contacts and cultural exchange are more within reach nowadays in the former communist countries, the stress on a creative environment, intellectual and



technical support (library, dictionaries, internet connections, desk chairs, etc) and individual creativity has become more pronounced. These aims do not really coincide with the aims of the Centre such as they are formulated on page 6. Or, to put it differently: the big project is the Centre itself, which opens up possibilities for individuals to cross the borders with the other guests who are staying there.

Over the years, the Centre has become an important place for literary creativity and a place where a common view on the situation of literature in both East and West, South and North, is held. The situation is somewhat at a different qualitative level today – a feeling well expressed by an Icelandic prose writer, who states that the BCWT is important “(...) *for writer-friendship, writer-solidarity, and last but not least to pep up the spirit in general, giving the deep and gratifying feeling that the world does care about authors.*” This writer-solidarity sometimes also becomes author-translator friendships in Visby. People continue their relationships after their stay, they may create common projects, etc. The following quotation from a German prose writer is typical: “*The contact with a writer from Finland, which developed in a friendship and a second meeting in Germany...*”

A German translator of Russian literature stresses the importance of the BCWT for people who want to learn more about the languages and cultures of the countries of the former Eastern block – which also confirms the validity of the original aims of the BCWT: “*At the BCWT I worked very, very well, recovered from everyday stress and struggle for everyday living and – very importantly: made friends from several countries. Especially the contacts with writers or translators from the states of the former USSR were very important for me as a translator from Russian. I met at the Centre my author XXX, gaining a very important possibility to improve our contacts and to work on translation of a planned book. With Asar Eppel or Vyacheslav Karpenko – both I met in Visby for the first time – I am also still in contact and now we are planning several projects together (all this because of the Centre, because we met each other there). A great and wonderful possibility (...) The Russian colleagues helped me to understand difficulties in the texts. I learned a lot about “Soviet”, Russian, Baltic, mentality – living together for some weeks with colleagues from the former USSR and this new knowledge helps me understand the books I translate much better. Also I met colleagues from Scandinavia, – Bodil Malmsten and Kristina Carlson from Finland – with them I am also still in contact today.*”

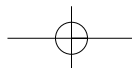


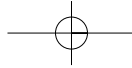
A Swedish playwright stresses: *“I have had fantastic meetings with interesting people, especially from Eastern Europe. A Lithuanian poet told me about the destiny of her mother. I was shaken. A Russian translator told me about the Stalin era, which he had himself lived through, witnessing how his close relatives were taken away from him. (...) I have learned about new authors and books. (...) My life has become richer because of those meetings with those people.”*

But the typical answer today looks more like the following one, from a German translator from Finnish, answering the question: “Why is the BCWT an important place for you and your colleagues? His answer, which epitomizes many translator-answers, is: *“Because I can concentrate there on working, all the troubles of everyday life are far away, and I can communicate about actual problems with my colleagues. At the same time it is refreshing to be at another place, not at home. Meeting colleagues is stimulating, and I can imagine that in Visby new ideas are born for cooperation between authors and translators. Translating, publishing books of one’s new friends from other countries.”*

Numerous works of great outreach and importance have been translated/created there. You may say that the “monastic” nature of the Centre (as confirmed by the statistical analysis) has become more and more important. People no longer come here so much any more to create projects, as to make their own creativity more profound and rich. A Finnish-Swedish prose writer, who has worked a lot at the BCWT, comments: *“For me it has been a very functional working place and a place for loyalty and friendship among writers and translators from different countries. After five visits to the Centre I feel I have my own favourite gym, my favourite café and my favourite pub in Visby. But the best experience of all has always been the kindness and consideration shown by the personnel.”*

In the atmosphere of trust that reigns in the Centre there is also place for meetings with the unexpected. To give an example of how the “Baltic” idea penetrates the minds in the very specific situation in Visby, let us take one Danish poet, particularly isolationistic, who made an unexpected discovery at the BCWT: *“Paradoxically enough, I discovered Russia (Pasternak, Mandelstam)”*. Another indirectly political consequence of the center’s functioning today was mentioned by a Danish author: *“I had never met people from the Baltic countries before. And it has been important to know that their life has been very problematic until recently (...). I found out how important freedom of expression is (...).”*





Projects, nevertheless

But the responses to the questionnaire also give hints about platforms of a new kind. A Polish writer and critic writes, commenting the role of the Centre today: *“The Centre fulfils the role of a place where it is possible to form important transnational contacts, where those who create European culture can meet and work together. It has working conditions which give inspiration and facilitate concentration (surroundings, Sea, peace).”* So here we have a “big project idea” – however it is no longer Baltic, but will now be European, following the entry of several Baltic countries into the EU.

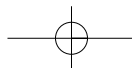
And a German translator from Swedish seems to have worked actively on such a transnational project during her stay: *“I met a Swedish-Finnish writer, got her book, wrote an account and found a German publisher. Now her book has been published in German. I met a Swedish writer, got her book, wrote an account, and looked for a publisher at about 10 publishing houses – but nobody was interested, because of the controversial political theme. I met a translator from Kraków, we got to be friends, she was with me once more in Visby, once in Rhodes, and I succeeded in helping her get at stipendium for Straelen. I met more good friends. The worst part was to go home to Germany into my lonely room.”*

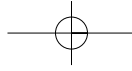
The initial foreign and cultural policy project is still alive, now on an individual basis. A Swedish translator remarks: *“Actually, I think that the BCWT is also a peace promoting place! Not that writers generally are likely to start wars... but understanding is the first step to preventing conflicts and promoting peace, and by getting together and exchanging experiences we learn to understand each other. And hopefully writers can use their influence in their respective countries to share and spread that attitude of understanding and acceptance that is so crucial.”*

Nature, culture, social life, trust and creativity

The somewhat changed political situation of the BCWT has also led to a new kind of integration of Gotland’s nature and culture into the works being created here. Actually, when reading the comments, nature, culture, social life and creativity seem to be so closely interconnected that they more or less represent different aspects of one indivisible “life” or “existence” in and around the Centre. In the descriptions, those aspects are interwoven in very special ways.

Ten years ago Gotland’s position may have been stressed more one-





sidedly as a (political) platform for dialogue. Now Gotland as a geo-poetic phenomenon penetrates creativity in another, more silent but undoubtedly more powerful way. The following quote from a German prose writer who visited Visby in 2002 characterises the situation as one of intercultural dialogue and also of creativity: *“The geographic location of the Baltic Centre on a hill overlooking the ocean is, above all, fantastic; the island of Gotland, situated in the middle of the Baltic Sea must indeed have evoked the wish to create here a place where writers and translators from the different Baltic countries – which in their geographical proximity, are culturally and politically in many cases quite far apart from each other – could meet, exchange views and ideas and push their work forward.”*

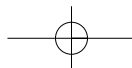
And the characteristic of “pushing work forward” is even more evident in a comment from a German literary couple after two visits to Visby, who felt the “Baltic” aspects of the place dominated their impressions, and perhaps also their work. *“At each stay we wondered about the quantity and quality of our work, that mostly seemed to go faster and easier while feeling thoroughly relaxed at the same time. We loved to stay in the nice rooms with the spectacular view of the seaside, the fantastic light of the evening skies, in this room with its perfect quietness and meditative atmosphere, only with the noise of the wind around the house coming up from the Sea. We met some very interesting authors and translators especially from Eastern Europe, and this gave us a real occasion to learn more about their countries, their literature, their language, their special usages.”*

A Swedish poet writes: *“I was able to do more work than I had expected thanks to the wonderful atmosphere.”*

A Norwegian prose writer speaks, in his responses, about the cultural and historical “energy” in Visby, and an Icelandic author tries to penetrate the place by comparing Gotland to his own insular origin, as a sort of antipode to Iceland: *Gotland seems to maintain an almost secret inner cultural continuity – in spite of being historically surrounded by wars and conflicts.*

A Finnish mathematician and essayist writes: *“I spent several days hiking and biking around this magical island. Those memories are unforgettably beautiful. They also directly influenced my book”.* And a German poet pursues the subject in this German-metaphysical way: *“Reinigung der Gedanken durch Gotlands Wind.”*

With the internationalisation both of literature and of the former

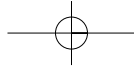


communist countries their authors and translators are becoming more experienced at cultural exchanges and are able to use international cooperative structures in new ways. Many of them have become experienced travellers and know institutions of the same kind as the BCWT in other parts of the world: Centres in Greece, France, England, Germany and Switzerland (82 persons out of 182 had stayed at such Centres, though many of them were Germans who spent time at the Translation Centre in Straelen). But Gotland still seems to be the favourite place.

One of the most beautiful testimonies from the questionnaire is about trust, dignity and complicity. About being a writer, and thus a marginal person, and being accepted by the others. It is the memory of a Latvian poetess on "what was best" at the Centre: *"We writers and translators from five or six countries had something like a party one night and wanted to use the dishwasher. It turned out that nobody knew how to set it in action. And best of all: everybody felt stupid, but nobody felt ashamed or confused"*. This might be one particular experience of being a poet or a writer that could be shared by people from East and West, South and North. Also it expresses a need, as I understand it, a need for a home, an accepting and acceptable home for such people who cannot, or do not want to, put a dishwasher into action.

These specific, inclusive and tolerant characteristics of the BCWT are underlined by a Russian translator, who puts forward the easygoing atmosphere at the Centre, the interesting combinations of people, as the main advantage of the BCWT. *"At another, materially richer, Centre for authors and translators the representative functions immediately become more important: you have to dine together, but though the food sometimes is exquisite and the kitchen is not "sticky" (as some say about the "Moscow kitchen" in the BCWT) – it generates an atmosphere of stress among the guests."*

The anti-collectivist attitude at the Centre generally gets a high rating from all the guests from the former Soviet block. A Russian playwright comments: *"The most important thing is that everyone is left on his own, being a master of his own time. This results in the feeling of freedom and independence."* And a Russian translator adds, answering the question: "what was best, what was worst": *"To be frank, what was worst was the attitude towards me of a compatriot and her attempts to cultivate (perhaps unconsciously) some of the worst features of Soviet collectivism"*.



A Finnish translator says: *“I have visited some other places and I must say that Visby is the best. There isn’t really anything to complain about. The houses are in good condition, the personnel run things very well. I will always remember you, Lena, and Gerda Helena as kind and gentle people”.*

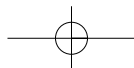
This evolution coincides with the more traditional wishes from Western European writers and translators. One Danish translator comments, answering the question: “Please tell us some memories of your stay (experiences, contacts, knowledge etc)”: *“The best thing about the stay was that I didn’t have to take sides with anything other than my writing, and that living conditions were as good as they were. It was a plus to meet as many interesting and good colleagues from the Nordic and Baltic countries (...) and the relaxed atmosphere in the house”.* But even among the writers who really want to isolate themselves, company is sometimes necessary, as well as the “pluses”.

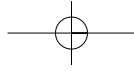
And a Swedish prose writer adds: *“The best – except for the possibility of working in a concentrated and yet relaxed way – is the contacts I have made with translators and writers from all around. That’s really wonderful”.*

The landscape and Visby

“Every morning in Visby I used to get up late, and take a look to see what the view was worth that day. The view with the Sea and the old cathedral. Then I went to the kitchen to have breakfast. After breakfast I used to borrow a bike and a good book from the Centre and go to the beach. When I returned it was already time to have dinner. Evening conversations with colleagues. Short walks in Visby at night. And around 11pm it was time to start working. Wonderful.” A Lithuanian poet staying at the BCWT.

Melting into the nature and culture of Gotland and Visby seems to allow for an almost naïve relationship to creativity and writing. A Finnish poet gives voice to this: *“Last time, maybe the very last day I was at the BCWT, I biked to the north of Visby, to the Seashore and went up on a rock. My collection of poems was almost ready, but just almost. The wind was howling, the sea was howling, and I read my poems to the wind and to the Sea. Then I knew that my poems were ready. I don’t know if this is exactly a good or a bad memory, but it is a very important memory to me”.* These ecstatic impressions of nature and architecture are often supplemented with a no less enthusiastic characterisation of colleagues and personnel. A Finnish guest, a researcher, underlines this “whole”, the totality of life, perceptions, meetings and creation: *“Because it is a beautiful place on*





a beautiful island and the personnel are beautiful as well. There is a great possibility to concentrate precisely on one's work and to enjoy the nice and useful company of colleagues."

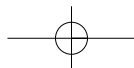
A Russian playwright comments: *"Everyday I spent in Gotland was beautiful in its own way. In the first place this is related to my work. When my eyes got tired of staring at the screen, I could look out of the window and enjoy the view of the Sea, the architecture, the red tile roofs. (...) The silence is a very precious thing at BCWT (the thing I often lack at home). I really enjoyed spending time with the group of my colleagues in March. (...) Communicating with my colleagues, I realized that no matter where writers live, they all have something in common."*

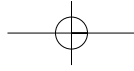
The perception of the city and its surroundings seems thus also to be related to the general *"atmosphere of tolerance and warmth"* that characterises life at BCWT, which is, no doubt, the reason for *"the unexpected fact that I was able to both work extremely intensively and enjoy the place and the people"* – as one Finnish translator remarks in the questionnaire. And a Finnish essayist specifies that *"living at the BCWT situates you beyond the structures of everyday life"*.

To leave or to abolish the structure of everyday life can in itself be characterised as a poetic act or an experience of a more or less ecstatic kind: the ecstatic tone is characteristic of many of the answers. To leave everyday structures seems equivalent to living a life close to one's creativity.

A famous Russian poet's way of commenting on the best thing about his stay is as follows: *"The best thing were the swans in the winter Sea at Christmas"*. Those swans are one expression of totality. In a slightly more differentiated way this "whole" is reflected by a Swedish poet: *"...the closeness to the Sea combined with long talks with colleagues AND the birth of unexpected ideas for new poems. The atmosphere is a PERMISSIVE one – it is OK to be a writer there."* And a Norwegian prose writer comments on nature, the city and ecstasy: *"The tour to Fårö left its trace. It was in the evening, and the tide came in, filled the rauks and the holes around them, wave after wave. I think this gave me an idea, or put me in a state of ecstatic concentration. (...) The church of which I had a view from my room, played its bells several times per day, and it was like a ritual, something that structured my writing in a rather strange manner..."*

And a Swedish childrens' author and prose writer describes "the best" thing about her stay at Visby in the following way: *"Best. The*





everyday meeting with Jesus during my working passes, waving to me from the wall of Saint Mary. (...) The quiet hours with the sky and the ocean and the cathedral when the words suddenly came alive”.

In a truly ecstatic manner a Latvian translator includes everything in a poetic evaluation of what was best: *“Fantastic. Absolutely new world. Selma and Edda and Astrid.”* A Norwegian translator gives a similar ecstatic testimony: *“If there is a paradise on earth it is called the Baltic Center for Writers and Translators”.*

A Norwegian prose writer seems to comment on this interplay between nature, culture and work in a particularly interesting way: *“There were so many good things about the stay. My room with a view of the cathedral and the sea. The writing desk by the window. Running along the Sea north of the city. My biking tours with all the stops at the stone churches. The sun setting beyond the Sea. The two days when we travelled around on the island doing readings, the stone pit where we read when the weather was so warm. Afterwards I have kept up my contacts with PHB, OH, CG and AJ. I have used experiences and landscapes in the novel I started working on during the stay. But the stay was even more efficient as a sort of space it created for serenity, deepening and concentration. That was the most important part about my stay.”*

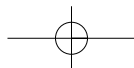
What is interesting about this quotation is, on the one hand, how well it describes the interaction between creative intentions and context and, on the other, how useful naïve experience, ecstasy, putting yourself in the hands of others is as a means to creating “space” for a literary and creative work that is anything but naïve.

As one more example, the following kind of commentary, from a German poet and prose writer, is quite a common answer to the question “What were you working on during your stay at the BCWT?": *“Writing. Poetry and prose (and a part of Gotland/Visby transformed itself into the third chapter of my most recent novel, published in 2002 – Mitgift)”.*

A Polish-German prose writer comments on the question: “What was best? What was worst?” in the following enigmatic way: *“Could I send it to you? I wrote a short novel about my stay in Visby. It is written in Polish, I translated the four first chapters into German.”*

The social factors

But the social factor, the lack of reciprocity and equality, the fact that



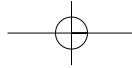
some people can only come to the BCWT if they get grants, and others can just step into their car and go there, continues to play against the aesthetic perception of the city, as in this ambivalent, extremely multifaceted answer to the modest question: “What was best? What was worst?” It appears to be the same thing: Visby. *“The best: In Visby I can feel as a small part of history, and the city gives me back my identity. I can return to myself. The worst: In real, practical Visby I perceive myself as a reality only in second hand shops and shops with reduced prices after the summer Season. I have many such souvenirs in the place of honour until this day. Those things also have their history, as I have one myself, but today I am not able to hear the history of Visby any more...”*

A Lithuanian poet adds: *“One thing. I now dream of Visby. That is the best (for you) and the worst (for me).”*

The lack of social justice, the imbalance of economic resources will continue to colour relations at the BCWT, even if both management and guests do their very best to put social brackets around the Centre. This fact will undoubtedly, sooner or later, put the questions of politics and cultural politics, and equality back on the agenda of the BCWT, and even more on the agenda of the BWC.

The positive experiences – the high quality of life and productivity, the monastical component, and the sometimes ecstatic vision of Gotland – sometimes lead the respondents to think that the place must be/should be protected from “the others”. If it were to become too famous, it would somehow be ruined. Comments of this kind come from all the countries: the Centre is “a well kept secret”, according to one Swedish respondent *“Among active Swedish writers and translators the BCWT is nowadays well known and has a very good reputation. But in general (besides in Gotland) it is a well kept secret.”*, and a Latvian poet states rather coldly that *“I think, there is no need for BCWT publicity outside professional circles”*. Another Latvian states that *“There is a specific situation in Latvia. As many writers go to Visby with grants from the BCWT or the Swedish Institute they do not want to write much about it, because they know that every colleague who hasn't been to Visby will ask him or herself: Why him and not me?”* A Lithuanian adds: *“BCWT is known among writers and translators in Lithuania, but they think that it is very hard to get a stay at Visby and that the procedure must be done with the help of the writers' union.”*

A Norwegian prose writer reflects the situation in a slightly different



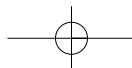
way: *“The Centre is rather well known among writers, but fame is double-edged, because many writers wish to keep Visby and Gotland as their secret writing place.”*

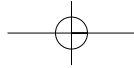
And a Swedish prose writer comments: *“It is rather well known among my colleagues, a fact that really influences my chances to go there in a negative way, because the place is always full.”*

Another Swedish prose writer and playwright adds in the following double-tongued way, commenting on the “fame” of the Centre: *“Among Swedish authors it is not that well known that/so you can stay there”. Yet another Swedish prose writer comments similarly: “It is not known at all to the public in Stockholm. People in Gotland of course know about it, writers do know, but not everyone. It is in a way kept like a diamond that you only tell people you like about”.*

A Russian playwright comments this way: *“Unfortunately, the BCWT is not well known, nor are other similar Centres. And writers who know about it think it is impossible to come there. For example my friends from St Petersburg think that only very well known writers with recommendations from the writers’ union can reach it – that’s why they do nothing about it.”*

This attitude is understandable, but it must also be understood that no well kept secret, except military ones, can count on continuing taxpayers’ funding if it does not appear in the media from time to time.





Conclusions and recommendations with regard to the aims of the BCWT

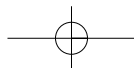
BCWT aims to:

1. Stimulate the literary and cultural exchange between the countries around the Baltic Sea, and serve as a workplace and meeting point for writers and translators from the Baltic Sea region.
2. Actively promote the Centre as a site for cooperative projects, such as seminars, encounters, educational programmes and conferences compatible with the guidelines of the BCWT.
3. Support the creation of a reference library compatible with the guidelines of the BCWT, as well as an information database on the literatures of the region.
4. Act as a promotor of the formation of cultural policy in the Baltic Sea region.
5. Constantly seek new forms and partners for collaboration between writers and translators in the region, prioritising the East–West aspect.
6. Contribute to increasing knowledge and exchanges between literatures and writers from the countries in the region.

Such are the aims of the BCWT

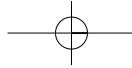
– let us go through them point by point:

1. Concerning the first point there is no doubt that the Centre is fulfilling its mission quite gloriously. Yes, this is a meeting point and a workplace for writers and translation of the region. And – as we saw in both the quantitative and the qualitative evaluations – the approval is almost total and enthusiastic.
2. The second point is less organic. It demands extra input of resources and personnel. Nevertheless some 50 important projects have been realized over the last ten years: poetry festivals, translation workshops, etc. There is, however, a lack of clarity. What is the



organic connection between the residential part of the BCWT and the “projects”? And what is the main task of the BCWT in times of economic scarcity? What is the actual input from the projects to the more basic residential work? This all has to be analysed once more by the board. Perhaps the most appropriate solution would be to revitalise the BWC as the initiator and performer of the projects. On a micro-level there is now important subtle work being done to integrate the residents in local literary life: more and more often residents are invited to read at libraries around the island.

3. A reference library is being built up now in the BCWT which already comprises some 7000 volumes handled and catalogued by a professional librarian and thus possible to find in the Swedish on-line LIBRIS database at the Royal Library in Stockholm (www.libris.kb.se). The library is far from complete, according to some of the respondents. It is still too much dependent on individual donations. It must be completed in a systematic way with recent literature from the Nordic and Baltic countries, both in the originals and translations. This demands time, money and space. The original project idea of a database on the literature of the region has not been realised. It, too, demands time, money and reflection. I propose that the BCWT address universities in the relevant countries with an offer to present their national literatures to the world, using the Visby Centre as a hub. This kind of activity would eventually also correspond to the suggestion from a Lithuanian scholar of creating closer ties among researchers, intellectuals and writers in the area.
4. Concerning contributions of the BCWT to the evolution of cultural politics in the Baltic States I do not have access to information. The answers to the questionnaire indicate nothing of the kind.
5. Some of the activities of the BCWT promote new kinds of alliances between partners in the Baltic countries. The translation workshops are one example. The informal meetings among writers and translators in residence do also fulfil those requirements. But another vector has become more important over the years: the north-south dialogue beginning with the cruise Waves of the Black Sea ending up



in the creation of the Centre for writers and translators at Rhodes, as well as the active networking of the BCWT in the European union.

6. The sixth is organically attached to the preceding points.

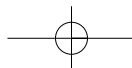
CONCLUSION

The BCWT is splendidly fulfilling its aims. On two points the aims need to be further analysed and possibly reformulated on the basis of the experience of the last ten years:

- How and why should the BCWT or the BWC carry out projects?
- What needs to be done in the field of cultural politics?

Conclusions and recommendations based on the quantitative analysis

- Women are in the majority as guests at the Centre. How is this reflected in the activities of the Centre? This has not been reflected in the “projects”.
- The position of translators may also need to be analysed and strengthened even more within the activities of the Centre. The BCWT ought to consider translators not merely as helping hands in transporting form and meaning from one language to another, but as artists in their own right. It is difficult to travel when you are a translator: you need reference books, and you need to have them in your room when you are working. Perhaps a solution to such problems could actually be invented at the BCWT?
- There is more prose written at the Centre than poetry. Must all literary festivals be poetry festivals? Why is children’s literature so little represented among the guests at the Centre? Is children’s literature too much attached to territory and everyday reality? Is this something to discuss at a seminar?
- Most Eastern Europeans rely on grants in order to be able to come to the Centre. It is a question of the identity of the Centre to be able to continue a generous policy in this respect. Therefore, and mainly therefore, future additional stable economic support is necessary. Without the Eastern Europeans, the Centre will be less interesting to Western Europeans.
- It could be important for the management of the Centre to increase access to information about the Centre, especially in those countries where “trust” in organisations, including writers’ organisations, is low



and competition for grants is sometimes tough and unfair. One Russian proposal is to present the Centre on the Russian internet so that it could be found by searching Yandex.ru. "Colleagues" are said to be the most important information source about the Centre. Keeping up the network with former guests is therefore very important.

- The guests at the BCWT are immensely positive concerning living and working conditions at the Centre.
- The importance of the Centre as a place for concentrated work is stressed in the answers to the questionnaire. This should be taken into account when resources are allocated, and when choices have to be made between a "project" and renovating, buying more books, etc.
- The Swedish segment of the guests is increasing and is now almost back to the rates of the mid 1990s. The management and the board should discuss whether or not this, as well as the high frequency of second and third visits of Swedish guests, is something really desirable.

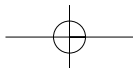
Conclusions and recommendations based on the qualitative analysis

The comments to the open questions are immensely positive. They stress the "inclusive" atmosphere, the "cool" management, the informal soft handling of problems, the beauty of the place, and the BCWT as a place and an institution that encourages literary work. The existence of the BCWT seems to contribute to giving the guests a "total", sometimes ecstatic, experience of creation, nature, culture and sociality, understanding and freedom. In such an environment based on trust, it is possible to accept the unexpected and to be curious about "the other" and his or her culture. Cultural exchange seems to be a question of free choice here, and of bottom-up structures.

The sometimes almost naïve trust in the BWC that filters through the answers is extremely precious and important for the future of the Centre and must be handled with care.

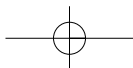
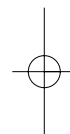
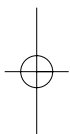
One of the great problems for the coming years in Europe is the integration process into European structures of the former countries of the Soviet block. This process is not an easy one. Different levels of consumption, different measures of control and defence may lead to new forms of distrust between East and West in Europe. The political and cultural need for a Centre like the BCWT is thus greater than ever.

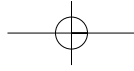
The only recommendation that could possibly be issued on the basis



of this evaluation is that the activities of the Centre must be continued, safeguarded and given a stronger financial basis.

Göteborg, April 2, 2004
Johan Öberg





Voices

BCWT guests

Hanne Ørstavik

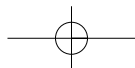
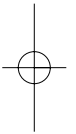
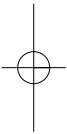
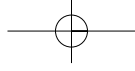
About a room, "I want a room for tonight"

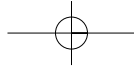
Eva Runefelt

A special chronology reigns at Uddens gränd...

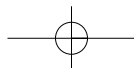
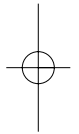
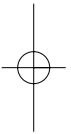
Kjell Westö

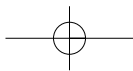
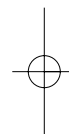
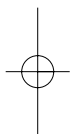
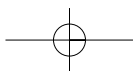
There are places with a mode of their own

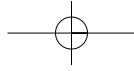




Writers' voices.
Reflections, thoughts,
ideas...







Voices

I can not imagine a better place for concentrating and writing. Because of the special spirit of Gotland, because I really feel here like home, because this place is not disturbing your thinking, your creativity or loneliness – all you really need for creating but you can get so rare.

BCWT guest, Latvia

I got some new and very nice colleagues. One of them is my best friend today. I still keep in contact with two others. I have never met people from the Baltic countries before and it has been very important to know that their lives have been very problematic until some times ago. I found out how important freedom of expression is, and freedom of expression is not always a matter of course.

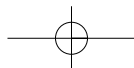
BCWT guest, Denmark

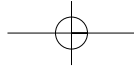
The best was the freedom, time was only for your thinking and writing.

BCWT guest, Estonia

I was very surprised because I got 35 poems from Gotland. At first I was just writing my novel and suddenly there was so many poems. I think this happened because of friendly people, fine nature and nice weather. Normally I can't live so near the big sea!

BCWT guest, Finland





The new contacts are very important. Being isolated and among your colleagues at the same time. Very special atmosphere in the house: our work during the day, our long talks at night at the kitchen table with candles and remains from the old Visby – unforgettable memories and new ideas for writing

BCWT guest, Lithuania

I have met some wonderful people at the BCWT and had some great conversations. My stays have contributed to my ongoing “mapping” of the world. Norway is a very west-orientated country – my stays at the BCWT has made me look east!

BCWT guest, Norway

The best was the very deep feeling of intellectual and physical revival.

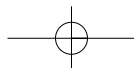
BCWT guest, Poland

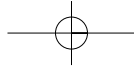
The most important thing is that everybody is left on his own, being a master of own time. This results in a feeling of freedom and independence. The silence is a very precious thing at the BCWT – which I often lack at home. Communicating with my colleagues I realized that no matter where the writers live – they all have something in common.

BCWT guest, Russia

The best: People I met and learned new things from, like new knowledge of other countries and others way of living and working. Actually I think the BCWT is a peace-promoting place! Not that writers generally are the likely category to start wars – but understanding is the first step to prevent conflicts and promote peace. By getting together exchanging experiences we learn to understand each other. And hopefully writers can use their influence in their respective countries to share and spread that attitude of understanding and acceptance that is so crucial.

BCWT guest, Sweden





The best were the people I met in the BCWT, the open international atmosphere with respect for everyone's personality. I will never forget the interesting evenings I spent in the kitchen with interesting discussions in several languages and with much laughter and fun. But it also was an atmosphere of hard working and I worked very much and very concentrated there – maybe because I was stimulated by all impressions and by the presence of other writers.

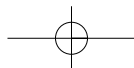
BCWT guest, Germany

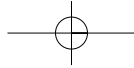
The most valuable aspect on my visit was the ability to focus on our work in a wonderful environment among people whose main interest was language and literature!

BCWT guest, USA

I find it ideal as it is. I suppose things always could be done to improve something, but in this case it would be hesitant to propose anything for fear of spoiling the perfection.

BCWT guest, Greece





Hanne Ørstavik

About a room

"I want a room for tonight."

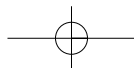
In several of Jean Rhys' novels, the main character is a single woman living in a rented room. A bedsit or hotel room in Amsterdam, London or Paris in the 1920s and 30s. Cheap rooms, a little shabby perhaps, but basically quite pleasant. But these arbitrary rooms in which the main character lives, which she does not own and which often she can hardly afford, are something more for Marya, Julia and Sasha.

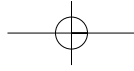
"Suddenly I feel that I must have number 219, with bath – number 219, with rose-coloured curtains, carpet and bath. I shall exist on a different plane at once if I can get this room, if only for a couple of nights. It will be an omen. Who says you can't escape from your fate? I'll escape from mine, into room number 219. Just try me, just give me a chance."

Sometimes they end up there anyway, in the ugly rooms, and it seems as though it has to be that way, as though the movement downward is preordained for these women, something inside them that triggers itself, so that they end up in the rooms with hideous wallpaper and furniture haphazardly assembled, with a view straight onto a wall.

But the rooms are not invariably significant. In good times, when they're enjoying life, when they feel strong, the room is almost a matter of indifference, even down to the cockroaches that emerge after nightfall.

But then there are the other days, days when everything is wrong. And with them comes the need to change rooms. Change to a better room, a room with a bath, with big windows, light and airy. When changing rooms becomes a way of escape, of exchanging oneself, one's own skin. Entering something else – a warmth, a compassion in things, in the surroundings, in the complete and meaningless stillness and silence of the walls. Days when entering a good room is no longer about the room but about the world, about a self that contains no border to the world, where the room itself becomes a replacement for





the body's physical border, in which the nature of the room tells you who you are.

Then, on such days, you disappear in the room that's much too big. In the dirty, ugly room you become dirty and ugly yourself, in the dark room you are dark, empty, in the narrow room locked into that hell that lies in wait, beneath the bed, behind the door, in the back of every cupboard in every room, everywhere.

"I've got to find another hotel. I feel ill and giddy, I'd better take a taxi. Where to? I remember that I have an address in my handbag, a brochure with pictures. La hall, le restaurant, le lounge, a bedroom with bath, a bedroom without bath, etcetera. Everything of the most respectable – that's the place for me..."

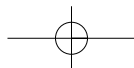
In August 2001 I spent ten days at the Writers and Translators Centre in Visby as a participant in a project for young Baltic and Nordic writers.

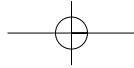
I had room Nr. 8, right at the end of the second-floor corridor, with a view past the cathedral to the open sea.

It was not until two years later, in the summer of 2003, that I read for the first time Jean Rhys' early novels. And found at last someone talking about that thing about rooms. About how it is. What it's about. That the thing about rooms is bigger, it's more extensive. That it isn't just one of my own private aesthetic quirks. It's existential. They're connected, the aesthetic and the existential, they meet, in the thing about rooms, the room you more or less by chance, more or less by choice, are to sleep in.

It hasn't helped to read Jean Rhys' novels, it hasn't got any better, I'm no less uneasy each time I'm despatched from the various receptions with a key in my hand to the door to the room where I am to sleep. And yet a chord was struck when I read these novels. Something existed because it existed in these stories, something profound and diffuse, about being in the world, in a room.

It was by chance that I ended up there, in Nr. 8. To begin with I shared a room with another writer, from Iceland, whom I'd already met at Arlanda. We travelled on the same flight, which was delayed. We arrived at the Centre in the same taxi and were given a double room on the ground floor facing the street and told that we'd each be given our own room as soon as one was vacant.



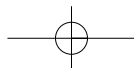


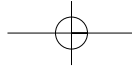
I entered the room. It was large, easily big enough for two, no, it wasn't that, on the contrary, to be sharing a room actually made it easier, and there were two large windows there, with a writing-desk between them, and a basin next to the wall. It was shadowed from the house opposite, the windows were large, all the same it wasn't a light room, it wasn't possible to see the sky except over by the window, I thought, if you stood right next to it and looked up.

I entered the room and knew I wouldn't be able to sleep there. The sky was one thing. But I sleep badly in rooms at ground level, and at ground level with the window open I don't sleep at all. The windows were so low that you could, if you were strong, get hold of one, open it, get your foot over and be in. Two of us would be sleeping here, and in the heat the window would have to be left open.

But I couldn't say anything, couldn't mention any of this stuff I saw in my mind's eye. Because I didn't know what it was. There was nothing wrong with anything. The room was quite alright, I was there as a guest, I had been warmly and courteously welcomed. There was nothing to complain about, and yet everything was wrong. What was I doing there?

The room was large, but I was stifled, trapped, the walls were a lovely blue, a light blue colour, but the colour was so cold, it didn't hold round me, it was cold, that blue colour in that large room facing the street. Nor did it help matters when my colleague from Iceland opened the window and sat up on the sill, opened another can of beer, gesticulated with her thin arm and stuffed the other hand down into the large pocket she'd sewn into the front of her skirt. (Because as she'd told me at the airport, when I complimented her on the pocket, that large pouchy pocket in the middle of the front of the skirt, she couldn't stand handbags. She had room for everything she needed in there when she went out, keys, money, a hairgrip, telephone card – that's it.) There sat my Icelandic colleague up on the window sill, gestured with her hand and laughed, come on, have a beer, in her Icelandic accent, rolling the R. Relax. She called something to a couple of boys walking by. But I know all I could do was stand there stiffly, my bag at my feet. I had no business being there. Everything was wrong, I might as well leave at once.





"I am still feeling ill and giddy. I say confidentially, leaning forward: 'I want a light room.' The young man lifts his eyebrows and stares at me. I try again. I don't want a room looking on the courtyard. I want a light room."

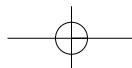
I asked if there was any chance at all of sleeping on the first floor. No, it's full up there, said Gerda Helena, and looked at me with her calm brown eyes. Gerda was one of the two women who ran the centre then, who had invited me, who had sent the letter I had opened so long ago, at home, standing on the steps, sometime before the summer, in March, or was it May. I'd been so happy.

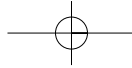
She left, I don't know what happened, there are only shadows there in my thoughts, into the room, if I went out into the corridor again, out, I remember standing in the phone box at the entrance to the white common room and ringing home in tears, turning my face away towards the corner each time one of the other young Baltic or Nordic writers I hadn't yet greeted walked past.

But then Gerda Helena appeared round the staircase, maybe I'd finished speaking, hung up, gone into the big kitchen with the window at either end so the light could sail through it, and the air, in the morning, when I came down, early, before all the others, and opened the window so the smell of last night's smoke could blow away and it could be cold and fresh and clear in the room. New.

Maybe that's where I was standing, in the kitchen? Do you know what, said Gerda Helena, I think in fact there is a room you can have, just wait here. She went back up to the office and came down again, and in her hand she had a wooden block with a key on a loop. She held it up. Look here, he's gone now. Someone had just that moment left. She said the room hadn't been cleaned, but if it was alright by me I could move in there at once. It was up on the first floor. Yes, I said.

And I followed Gerda Helena over the road back to the old seamen's home where the rooms were, the studies with bedrooms and bathrooms, and we climbed the stairs up the first floor, up and along the long corridor. Here it is, said Gerda Helena, and unlocked the door. And there it was. A regular little room, with light, warm yellow walls, a bed on the right, a wardrobe and a chair to read in, and a standard lamp on the right. Straight ahead, in front of the window, was the writing desk. There in front of the window facing the great wide space outside.





It was sunny that day on Gotland. Sunshine and blue sky, a clear blue sky, and the sea too was blue, and the big trees down by the Sea past the cathedral were dark green and huge and solid and massive.

Gerda Helena looked at me. Will this do you? She must have gone. I left my bag where it was, sat up on the writing-desk with my legs dangling, and just sat there, looking out. Out through the open window, and into the warm air in the great space outside.

As if there were no sounds. When I think back on it now it's completely silent there, as if it was sealed.

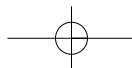
Suddenly I was happy. Suddenly I felt peaceful. Suddenly I felt strong and safe.

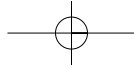
I was no longer alone.

"A beautiful room with bath? A room with bath? A nice room? A room?... But never tell the truth about this business of rooms, because it would bust the roof off everything and undermine the whole social system. All rooms are the same. All rooms have four walls, a door, a window or two, a bed, a chair and perhaps a bidet. A room is a place where you hide from the wolves outside and that's all any room is. Why should I worry about changing my room?"

Translated by Robert Ferguson

HANNE ØRSTAVIK's (born 1969) first book, *Hakk*, was published in 1994. She is one of Norway's leading writers. She has been the recipient of a number of literary awards, among them the Sult Prize, the P2 radio channel's Listeners' Prize for the best novel of the year, the Doubloug Prize and lately the Brageprisen 2004. Her books have been widely translated.





Eva Runefelt

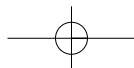
A special chronology reigns at Uddens gränd...

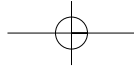
A special chronology reigns at Uddens Gränd, and it does so regardless of whether your room has a view of the sea or of the old wall. I believe it is a temporal rhythm you always have somewhere inside you, but which is restrained behind bars in most of the places you find yourself at work. Somewhere inside you, this considerably slower time lies in wait ready to be liberated – it is surely this you sometimes come across in the form of a chafed heel when you walk too fast back home in the city streets of Stockholm.

Ideas can turn up in somebody's head and skirmish with each other without a care for whether the body carrying that head is in a city, out in the most inaccessible countryside, in an igloo or in deep sleep, but there are extremely few places indeed where at any rate my ideas and writing images dare to settle down for longer than some miserable second or so. At the Baltic Centre, they enter into the room I have been assigned, they are not driven away by that usual old restlessness or "Why didn't I train as a speech therapist?". They stay there, which is a miracle every time it happens. The inner time is given its own space and this in turn gives space for the urge to write, an urge that so often disappears off on an underground train going north when I am going south.

I have been at the Centre to work – by which I mean to write and read – two or three times and it is a wonderful mystery, that which happens then. Last year, as November became December, I spent a week there, and only one hour after I had put my computer on the desk I was sitting there writing. That never happens at other places.

At the Centre, I have permission to be the person who wants to write, read, reflect, walk in the haven of the atmosphere that the people as well as the walls breathe out. My thinking is not subject to being constantly interrupted by outer and inner stress. Here one is allowed to

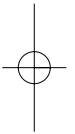
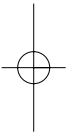




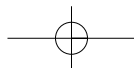
stay in a thought which can become an image which can become a
line which can become a poem.

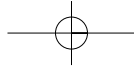
Rather fantastic and vital.

Translated by Rod Bradbury



EVA RUNEFELT (born 1953) lives in
Stockholm and is one of the leading
Swedish poets, with a number of praised
poetry books.





Kjell Westö

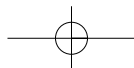
There are places with a mode of their very own

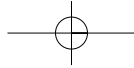
The first time I stayed at the Writers' Centre, it happened to be June. I had published a novel a couple of years earlier, and had been successful at home in Finland, in fact more successful than I could cope with, because I was caught up in a tread wheel of readings and interviews and had a problem getting started on my next book even though the characters of the novel were already walking around inside my head and talking with each other. I suppose one could say that on that particular occasion I fled from Helsinki to Visby in order to keep my protagonists-to-be alive.

I stayed on the ground floor, with a window towards the sea, and when I opened the windows the sunlight poured in, and the smell of grass and salt-water and seaweed. In another room sat the Danish author Charlotte Weitze and dreamt and wrote, and in a third room translator and birdwatcher Gitte Lyngs was struggling with a volume about intellectual history, although you could tell by looking at her that she would rather have taken her binoculars and gone off to Stora Karlsö and walked around purring in the sun.

One evening, when we had had enough of words, our own and others', Gitte and Charlotte and I bought some wine and cycled down to the beach, and then we sat there until the sun sank down into the sea. Another evening, I saw a heron fly up from a beach rock on the coast near Lummelunda. A third evening, the translator Juliana Jahnina treated us all to a fantastic, home-made meal before travelling home to Moscow.

In the daytime I walked along Norderstrand and listened to Van Morrison's *Wild Night* and Neil Young's *After the Goldrush*, and then sat in the Garden of the Bathing Friends reading Einar Már Gudmundson's *Angels of the Universe*. Slowly, I started to find my way back into myself, and during my last ten days in room 2 I wrote straight off the first seven chapters of the novel I had been trying to





find for such a long time. And there were not many words that I had to change when I went through the chapters in Helsinki some months later; the sea, the open horizon, the long and mild evenings, the many laughs together with colleagues, it had all contributed to my being immediately able to find the right words and the right mode for my tale.

On the last day, I lay beneath a large oak and listened to the sougning of the wind and thought: What a superb place when you want to get started with a book. I want to come here again.

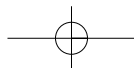
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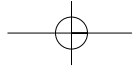
The second time I came to the Centre it was April. I came at the beginning of the month and I came yet again by ship because I wanted to see Gotland appear on the horizon and gradually grow bigger as islands do when you approach them by sea. It was cold, and during the first days there was a chilly rain mixed with snow. But at the Centre there were two other Finns, Tapio Koivukari and Sanna Tahvanainen, and while the storm passed the cliffs we made dinner together and beat off the cold with dishes smelling of basil and red wine.

During that stay, I worked incredibly hard; I always work hard when I'm in Visby, but that time I almost lost control. I wanted to get my novel ready for the publishers and my colleagues said that I looked pretty hollow-eyed when I came into the kitchen to make some food.

On Good Friday morning I had reached the chapter where I was going to kill off my main character, Werner, for whom I felt a warm devotion. But the church bells of Visby rang out in peals, and they continued to peal, and an Easter procession passed by the Centre on its way out through the North Gate, and when I got to the scene where my Werner falls and hits the back of his head on a stone and cracks his skull, my courage failed me. I borrowed the Centre's car and drove down to Sudret instead. But on Easter Sunday he died, Werner.

Then the week after Easter, the summer warmth arrived. The Japanese magnolia in the Garden of the Bathing Friends came into bloom; thousands of dazzlingly white flowers on naked twigs, only somebody who has seen it knows what the rest of you have missed! And the trees came into leaf, all of a sudden there were flowers and the sound of birds everywhere. But me, I sat in my room upstairs, with the curtains drawn, and wrote a chapter the key sentence of which was: *"Slowly the world was covered in snow"*.





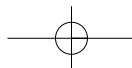
But I finished it, and the last day I drank a cup of strong coffee sitting outside the Kafé Norrgatt in the residential area above the North Gate. And I thought: What a superb place when you want to bring a book to a close. I want to come here again.

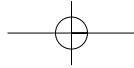
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The third time, it was March. Behind me lay a very hectic six months, a period with performances and journeys, and I had come to Visby mostly to put myself together and search through the nets of my brain in the vague hope that deep in the depths, some ideas had got caught without my noticing it, got caught while I had travelled around and lived on the surface.

This time, the author and singer Carl-Johan Vallgren was in town, he had rented lodgings at Bredablick, and I remember how one Saturday evening he turned up at the Centre with a decent-sized canister of good vodka, and how he got us all to dance to ABBA, after which he suddenly disappeared and then the party was over. He is like that, Carl-Johan, he turns up like a will-o'-the-wisp and lights up his surroundings and when he disappears, he takes his intensity along with him. We started on a tennis match that March month, C-J and me. One Friday evening he won the first set 6-3; he is a better player than I am. But the following Friday I won the second set 6-2; my serve is better than his, and that Friday it worked perfectly. We have sworn that one day we shall finish the match, in Visby or anywhere at all in the world, and I think Carl-Johan is more nervous about it than I am: several times, he has mumbled something about it simply being impossible for a Swede to lose to a Finn at tennis.

The same March month, but a little later. It is Sunday, it is grey and misty and a fair number of us have rented a little van and driven down to Närsholmen, the low-lying and seemingly endless beach where Andrei Tarkovsky is said to have shot the film *'The Sacrifice'*, which was to be his last film. From that misty day, I have a picture of a particular moment. Before my eyes, I can see the Rumanian translator Monica Bunu, there is Håkan Lindquist from Stockholm, there is Tor Öystein Overaas from Norway and several others, and we are friends but we are all walking by ourselves, deep in our own thoughts, a stone's throw from each other, and we pick shells and gaze out into the mist that has sunk down over the sea.





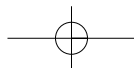
The last evening that March month, I sat at Schenholm's and drank a glass of wine and was full of new pictures and thoughts and ideas. And I thought... well, yes, you already know what I usually think the evening before I am due to leave the Centre and Visby.

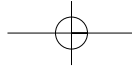
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The following year, I flew through a snowstorm in the middle of winter, and yet again the magic worked; I found my way back into a novel that had been put aside for more than a year. The year after that, I came to get myself shipshape again after a hectic working period. And this year I came with a suitcase that was full of books and weighed 29 kilos. I came in the hope of finding a path into a novel that I had long been dreaming about, and behold: during my three weeks at the Centre I found the gate, and now there remains 'only' years of wobbly nerves and hard work, years that require a well-padded bottom and patience and most certainly one or two sojourns at the Centre.

The last evening, we ate dinner together, eleven authors and translators, and of course Lena and Yvonne, the good fairies of the Centre. After dinner, we went upstairs and made ourselves comfortable in the sofas and armchairs and went on talking, and in the middle of the night we danced, Maud from Switzerland and Jaan from Estonia and Lena and Dace and Guntis from Latvia and so on and so on, we danced to Cuban son and Brazilian salsa, and that type of Balkan folk music with $7/8$ rhythm or $5/4$ or something similarly crazy, and we simply had a hell of a good time.

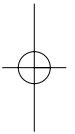
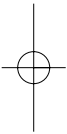
I notice that I can't really get this right, you know. I don't know how I shall describe it to you, the wonderful and irrational logic of the place, I don't know how I shall describe the many meetings between different cultures and languages, I don't know how I shall describe the very special mix of hard work and relaxing walks, and a feeling of togetherness that crosses every imaginable boundary. And I can't do justice to the town of Visby, I don't have the words for either the way it wakes up in the spring or its winter light, the fantastic shifts between lead-grey and ash-grey and white when the skies and the sea and the dark seasons of the year all meet. All I know is that I can always breathe and think and read and write here, and that my life would be so much the poorer without Norrgatt and Bakfickan and the church bells that change their ringing according to season, and the eighty-five





steps from the church to the Centre up there on the cliffs. The point is really very simple: it is unbelievable that so many authors and translators could live and work and manage for so long without a place like this, and it is even more unbelievable that we never understood just how much we missed it.

Translated by Rod Bradbury



KJELL WESTÖ (born 1961) lives in Helsinki and writes in Swedish. He is a well-known and praised author both in Sweden and Finland. His books are translated into several languages.

