



BALTIC CENTRE for WRITERS and TRANSLATORS

Annual Report 2014



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In 2014 the Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators, devotedly facilitating and promoting multinational writing and translating residency, stimulated the literary and cultural exchange between the countries around the Baltic sea and beyond. BCWT, pursuing its aim to provide authors and translators an inter-cultural opportunity, the time and space to write, read, translate, study, conduct research, give readings and become part of the vibrant and diverse literary context, served as a work and meeting place for a broad international community of more than 200 writers and translators from 26 countries.

2014 was also the year of bringing the long-term commitment to support training of translators into a book form, and BCWT in cooperation with its partners published an anthology of the translated texts.

In 2014 BCWT deepened the existed and established new cooperations internationally, nationally and regionally. BCWT started developing activities for children on Gotland.

BCWT put special efforts in making BCWT more visible and reaching out *with a narrative* of its activity to general public.

Read here about how BCWT is governed and managed, and its very essence – being a home for literary creation, a writers’ and translators’ on-going workshop, an international meeting point and a place for significant encounters and learning.

And as an insight into “the daily” at the BCWT dive into the Serbian poet Jasmina Topic’s *Letters from the North*, attached to the report.

Introduction

Since it was created in 1993 on the initiative of the writers and translators' organizations in the Baltic sea region and in the Nordic countries and as tangible result of the 1992 Writers' and Translators' Cruise, "Baltic Waves", the Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators has been offering writers and translators a workplace, international meeting point and stimulating environment. Since then more than 4400 authors and translators from all over the world stayed and worked at BCWT in Visby. Valued in books - not less than 3500 titles have been worked on, written or translated.

BCWT devotedly aspire to stimulate professional exchange, create links and networks across national borders, strengthen freedom of expression, disseminate knowledge and build bridges between languages and cultures. Seminars, conferences, publications and literary events the centre organized, mostly in collaboration with international, national and regional organizations are conducted in the same spirit.

BCWT is funded by the Swedish state and Region Gotland and has acquired significant support from the European Union

How BCWT is being governed and managed

Members and founders

of the non-profit organization BCWT (Östersjöns författar- och översättarcentrum) are the Swedish Writers' Union, Gotland County Administration and Region Gotland. The members appoint three representatives each to the Board of Representatives and nominate the Swedish members to the Board of the BCWT.

Representatives

Gotland County : Britt Silfvergren, Louise Hoffman Borgö

Region Gotland: Barbro Andersson, Mats Sundin, Lilian Edwards / Deputies: Eleonore Hemström, Bo Björkman, Eva Gahnström.

Swedish Writers' Union: Lena Karlin, Katarina Kieri, Marie Lundquist

Annual Meeting of the Representatives was held on 12 May.

Board of the BCWT

is composed of a Chairman and six members and six deputies who are appointed by the Representatives on the annual meeting and the Board internally appoints its Deputy Chairman. Of the Board's six members, two are nominated by the Swedish Writers' Union, two - by the County Administration of Gotland, of whom one represents Uppsala University Campus Gotland (earlier Gotland University College), one member is to be nominated by Region Gotland. The Baltic Writers' Council nominate two

members representing the foreign Writers' and Translators Unions for a two years' period.

Members of the Board

Olle Jansson, chairman, Uppsala university Campus Gotland

Robert Hall, Region Gotland

Thomas N. Persson, Gotland County Administration

Janina Orlov / Stefan Ingvarsson, Swedish Writers' Union.

Heidi von Wright, Finland's Swedish Writers Association; Baltic Writers' Council.

Yuliya Tsimafeyeva, Belarus Writers' Union, Baltic Writers' Council

Deputies: Anna Hrdlicka, Region Gotland / Ingela Bendt, René Vazqu ez D az, Viveka Sj rgren, Swedish Writers' Union / Liutauras Degesys, Lithuanian Writers' Union and Hannu Niklander, Finnish Writers' Union, both through Baltic Writers' and Translators' Council

Meetings of the Board

During the year 2014 the Board had three meetings, all held in Visby

25 March, 12 May, 10 November

Baltic Writers' Council – BWC (since March 2014: Baltic Writers' and Translators' Council)

The Baltic Writers' and Translators' Council (BWTC) represents 21 literary organizations, 12 countries and approximately 17.000 members around the Baltic region and beyond.

The Council which was founded during the legendary authors and translators' Baltic Sea voyage in 1992 is a multinational, non-profit, non-governmental organization which promotes the freedom of expression, democracy and the free flow of ideas and information between the writers' and translators' organizations. It also aims to support and inspire BCWT activities. The BCWT is the headquarters for BWC, which nominated two members and two deputies to BCWT's Board. The chairperson of Baltic Writers' Council is **Janina Orlov**

BWC had its annual General Assembly on 27-28 March at BCWT.

The Office

has been open every week-day 8.30 a. m. - 4.30 p.m.

Employees:

Lena Pasternak - director

Patrik Muskos - managing assistant, on leave from 1 November

Karl Johan Frisk - assistant, part time from 11 November

Maria Molin - assistant, part time from 11 November

Amanda Karlsson - household cleaning

Mimmi Muskos - cleaning, temp

Services:

Accountant: Gustav Söderdahl

Auditors: Tore Karlström and Mikael Wollbo



BCWT is a haven for work and a forum for exchange

“building bridges and breaking barriers”

BCWT is a work place for writers and translators with residency priority given to literary professionals from the countries of the Baltic Sea region and Nordic countries, yet the centre is open for applicants from all over the world. The main criteria for receiving a residency grant is the professional character of literary occupation that is an applicant can present publications. The regular application form contains CV, list of publications, description of the project to be worked on.

During 2014 the BCWT hosted 202 residing guests from 26 countries. They could devote themselves to a literary project of their own, staying in average 2-5 weeks on a residency bursary, t. i. free of charge, and with 24-hours full access to all BCWT's facilities. Furthermore, SIDA, German Translation Fund, Swedish Writers' Fund, Swedish institute, Estonian Writers' Union, Finland Swedish Writers' Association, Norwegian Writers Union, et al granted a number of individual earmarked bursaries, meant for a working residency at the BCWT. Majority of 202 residing guests were authors and translators of poetry, prose, plays, screenplays, film scripts, libretto, essays, children books, non-fiction within humanities, though occasionally cultural administrators, publishers and other guests working in

the literature field stayed in connection to a shorter project or meetings. BCWT actively aimed to facilitate dialogue between writers and for visibility of Centre's international activity. The Centre extensively served as a place for readings, Open Houses, film-screenings, meetings, talks, receptions, mingles, dinners and study visits.

Serving and promoting the BCWT as an international meeting place the organization has been investing significant efforts into creating good working environment and welcoming conditions to develop professional and personal contacts and networking. Dinners, tea-hours, combined with talks and presentations of work-in-progress contribute to deeper acquaintance with each other's writing, culture, backgrounds, experiences. To inspire the guests by extraordinary historical and natural richness of the island, to create more opportunities for international dialogue-on-road a great number of excursions in Visby and around Gotland were arranged for residing guests and participants of the projects. A great number of presentations of the BCWT's activity were done for booked and drop-in study visits to the BCWT's premises.

Along with the centre's daily work one of the buildings was under major renovation, exterior and interior, including roof work, painting, rebuilding, and changing ventilation system, with everything this work demanded: moving furniture, packing in the library. The work continued until the end of October. Since then the Centre settling "back" in the entire space, as well building up and reorganizing the library.

Cooperation with Baltic Art Centre, Visby International Centre for Composers, International Centre for Local Democracy, SWEDESD, Campus Gotland, Uppsala University, Almedal Library, RFSL, Film on Gotland, that are also located on Gotland, was intensified and deepened. Joint encounters were arranged to create opportunities for professional and personal exchange. New ideas and projects have been sown and will for sure give fruit in the near future.



2014: WRITERS AND TRANSLATORS-IN-RESIDENCE

	Days		2818	
	Unique guests		202	
	Countries		26	
	Total		Unique guests	
	days		202	
	2818		202	
Sweden	734	26,04%	78	38,61%
Belarus	308	10,92%	18	8,91%
Norway	292	10,36%	19	9,40%
Finland	265	9,40%	19	9,40%
Germany	178	6,31%	11	5,44%
Iceland	149	5,28%	7	3,46%
Estonia	118	4,18%	5	2,47%
Denmark	101	3,58%	8	3,96%
Lithuania	89	3,15%	5	2,47%
France	85	3,01%	3	1,48%
Serbia	66	2,34%	3	1,48%
Slovenia	63	2,23%	4	1,98%
Poland	63	2,23%	3	1,48%
Greece	51	1,80%	2	0,99%
Russia	45	1,59%	4	1,98%
the Czech	37	1,31%	2	0,99%
Ukraine	32	1,13%	1	0,49%
Spain	29	1,02%	1	0,49%
US	27	0,95%	1	0,49%
Italy	19	0,67%	1	0,49%
Canada	15	0,53%	1	0,49%
South				
Korea	14	0,49%	2	0,49%

Belgium	14	0,49%	1	0,49%
Australia	10	0,35%	1	0,49%
UK	8	0,28%	1	0,49%
Latvia	6	0,21%	1	0,49%

Profession

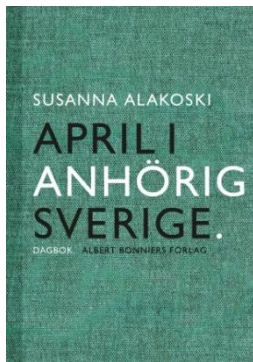
	Days		Guests	
Writers	1860	66,00%	127	62,87%
Translators	776	27,53%	52	25,74%
Others	182	6,45%	23	11,38%

Others = Musicians, politicians, playwrights,
dramaturgist etc.

Gender

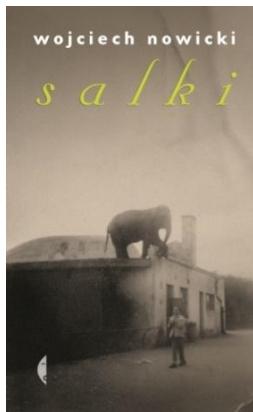
	Days		Guests	
Female	1700	60,32%	130	64,35%
Male	1118	39,68%	72	35,64%

Some of the books that took form at BCWT:

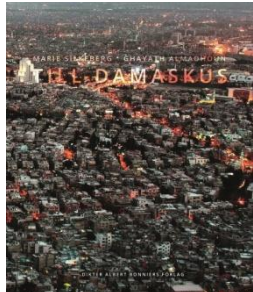


"Idag ligger havet under en mossgrön yllefilt. Detaljerna i Visby lösgör tankarna."

"Vilken tur att Baltic Centre finns så att vi kollegor får mötas! Vill göra en lista med mänskliga protester i förtryckta länder."



The Polish writer Wojciech Nowicki's book "Salki" received Poland's most prestigious price for essay book.



Marie Silkeberg and Ghayath Almadhoun's poetry book *Till Damaskus* was recognized by critics and readers

Anthology

La Fabrique européenne des traducteurs / European Smithery of Translators

In 2014 BCWT's engagement in the activity of the network came to a new stage and resulted in the publication in December of a bilingual Swedish-German Anthology. The Anthology is one of the outcomes of BCWT's cooperation with Übersetzerhaus Looren in Wernetshausen in Switzerland and International Translators' Centre in Arles, France. In the previous year BCWT with the partners organized a two-months long Swedish-German translation workshop, targeted at literary translators in the beginning of their professional carrier. The workshop is part of the European project *La Fabrique européenne des traducteurs*, aspiring to support a new generation of

translators. The project has been funded by the European Union with LEONARO Lifelong Learning, with complementary grants.



The Anthology contains the following texts into German:

Caroline Weiland translated *Handlingen* by Sara Mannheimer

Therese Korritter translated *Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar. 1 Kärleken* by Jonas Gardell

Stefan Pluschkat translated *Kairo* by Andrzej Tichy

into Swedish:

Jens Ahlberg translated *Knaben und Mörder* by Hermann Ungar

Viktor Englund translated *1979* by Christian Kracht

Jesper Festin translated *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen* by Jens Sparschuh

Grants

BCWT in cooperation with Literature Journey Belarus, Belarusian and Swedish Writers Union and with the financial support from SIDA and Swedish Institute hosted ten translators and four writers from Belarus.

German Translators' Fund awarded bursaries to a number of German translators and Estonian Writers Union to Estonian writers for a residency at BCWT.

With the support of the Swedish Institute and in cooperation with the cultural association "Krokodil" in Belgrad BCWT hosted as well as introduced to the Swedish audience two Serbian writers.

Events, public readings, meetings

February 14

Centennial celebration of **Britt G. Hallqvist**, translator, psalm writer and poet. Gerda Helena Lindskog read texts and talked about her mother Britt G Hallqvist's life and work. Lena Pasternak - about Britt G Hallqvist's translation of T S Eliot's "Practical Cats". Olle Jansson - recitation.

February 15

An audio drama and reading session with **Micael Libera**.

A program in collaboration with BAC.

March 18

Charter-trip to the Sun. **Göran Willis**, writer and TV-journalist, on his on-going book project "*How going abroad became a pleasure for everybody*"

March 25-30

Baltic Meetings "The Double Core of Europe" and **General Assembly**

Arranged by Baltic Writers' and Translators' **Council** in cooperation with Baltic **Centre** for Writers and Translators and Almedal Library

Keynote by **Dmitri Plax** "Triple espresso"

Readings, lectures and discussions with **Janina Orlov**, **Tittamari Marttinen**, **Stefan Ingvarsson**.

'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean so many different things?' *The manifold identity of literary translation*

Chair: **Janina Orlov** (Sweden) **Mudite Treimane** (Latvia), **Kazimiera**

Astratoviene (Lithuania), **Jaana Nikula** (Finland)

Hanna Butyrchyk (Belarus) *Double Identity within the Belarusian Context*

Yulya Tsimafeyeva (Belarus) *No Market, no Fame: Encouraging young Writers in modern Belarus*

Sofi Oksanen (Finland): *Swinging on the Iron Curtain*

Double Identities in Childrens' Literature

Chair: **Tittamari Marttinen** (Finland)

The Lithuanian Writer at a Crossroads

Liutauras Degešys (Lithuania)

Double identities in the Baltic Region in the light of recent events in Crimea – a discussion!

Moderators: Janina Orlov and Stefan Ingvarsson

May 22

23 civil servants from 7 East-European countries visited the BCWT for the meeting with writers and joint discussion as a part of ITP Local Democracy and Social Sustainability with a Gender Perspective

July 3

Almedal "Politicians" Week. A reception attended by c a 150 people. Arranged by the network Creators of Culture (Kulturskaparna), an umbrella organization for Swedish creative unions of Journalist, Writers, Composers, Filmmakers.

30 August – 17 September. "Late Summer at BCWT" Festival

How is it to be an artist in today's Kiev when the car tires on fire and cobblestones thrown, and the boundaries between art and politics, art and protest, activism and installation really been erased? Writers and artists in the course of events immediately react to what is happening and convey the image further. How come that a Catalan writer living in Barcelona places the plot of his book to Visby? What drives a Swedish poet to drill down into the war-torn Syria and seamlessly intertwining poetry and politics? And the results are the films "The City" and "The Celebration" and the book "To Damascus" which the critic Aase Berg in Dagens Nyheter described with the words: "This is political poetry in full strength." How is it to be a writer in Estonia today? Where are the stories of Estonian Russians of today? Are they to be found on the run in today's Denmark, with the adventurous quest for meaning and truth, or among odd fates in Estonia between the wars?

These and other questions were asked and answered when the Gotlanders met Vasyl Lozynskyi, David Nel • lo,, Marie Silkeberg, Urmas Vadi, Andrei Ivanov, Alja Adam, Maja Vidmar, Odile Kennel at the Baltic Writers and Translators in September in the program series "Late summer at the Centre".

August 30

Vasyl Lozynskyi. Quo vadis? Where are you going, Ukraine?

Exhibition, reading, screening.

September 3

David Nel • lo, a Catalan writer and translator from Barcelona, read from and talked about *Mr Rutins New Life*, a book that was started during the author's stay on the Baltic Writers and Translators' Centre in summer 2012. The action takes place in Visby. The book received the publishing group Edebés Award for Best Book for Children in 2014.

Alja Adam and **Maja Vidmar**, poets from Slovenia, read their poems, spoke about their writing and, applying the gender perspective, about position of poetry and poets in Slovenia.

September 9

Marie Silkeberg showed her and the Palestinian poet Ghayath Almadhoun's films *The City* and *The Celebration*, talked about and read from their co-authored book *To Damascus*

September 11

Urmas Vadi, Estonian playwright, author and radio journalist, was at the Centre "to write the best novel". Conversation and reading.

September 17

Andrei Ivanov sees himself as a part of the Russian literary tradition, but identifies with and takes creative nourishment from his native Estonia. He told of his experiences and his way of writing and read from his best-selling novel *Harbin moths*

Odile Kennel, German / French writer, poet and translator, grew up bilingual and lives and works in Berlin. She translates poetry from French, Portuguese and Spanish. Her latest novel *Was Ida sagt* was published in 2011.

Serbian writers at BCWT

In cooperation with the cultural association "Krokodil" and the Swedish Institute two Serbian writers stayed at BCWT in autumn. In connection to their residencies public readings were arranged and their texts were translated.

October 28

Bojan Babic spoke about his work on a new novel he worked on in Visby and read from the published short story collection. He also made an overview of the literary situation in Serbia.

November 19

Jasmina Topic read her poetry and showed her poetic film, the visual language of which is deeply connected to her poetic one.



Boban Babic



©Polina Moroz

November 12

Participation in **Gotland Pride**

Readings in cooperation with LGBT on Gotland

10 December

Open House and Christmas Mingle at BCWT. **Book launch, book sale, quiz walk** through and around Centre's both house and it's "secret" rooms, slideshow about centre's history and today with facts, figures and reflections.

December

After an intensive time of editing and proof-reading the **Swedish-German Anthology** was launched.

Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators together with Baltic Art Center, Visby International Centre, Bergman estates and Film on Gotland announced an open call for **Gotland Film Lab residency**. Residency is aimed for writers, screenwriters, directors, documentary filmmakers, composers, audio engineers, photographers and artists in moving images.



Lena Pasternak and Jasmina Topic



Margit Schenker and Elisabeth Wandeler

BCWT's activity is financed by :

Swedish Arts Council, Region Gotland.

With the contribution from Finland Swedish Writers' Union

Projects and bursaries were funded by:

European programme LEONARDO - Lifelong Learning

Swedish Institute

SIDA

German Translation Fund

Kulturkapitaal (Estonian Culture Fund)

In 2014 BCWT cooperated and communicated, on a daily basis and in connection to projects, with a great number of international, national and local organisations and authorities. Among others:

Swedish Arts Council, Swedish Arts Grants Committee, County Administration on Gotland, Region Gotland, Swedish Writers' Union, Übersetzerhaus Looren in Switzerland, Collège International des Traducteurs Littéraire in Arles, Baltic Writers' and Translators' Council, Finnish Writers' Union, Publishing house *Natur och Kultur*, Baltic Art Center, Visby International Composers Centre, Ventspils International Writers' and Translators' House, Estonian Writers' Union, Swedish Embassy in Riga, Litteraturreisa Belarus, Swedish Institute, Cultural Association "Krokodil" in Belgrad, Uppsala University and Uppsala University Campus Gotland, Almedal Library Visby, International Centre for Local democracy, Pride Gotland, RFSL Gotland, German Translators' Fund, Network Fabrique Traducteurs Europeene, network RECIT - Réseau Européen des Centres Internationaux de Traducteurs littéraires, Literarische Colloquium Berlin, Gotland County Library, Network *Kulturskaparna*, Swedish PEN, föreningen Roxy, Film on Gotland, Bergman Centre, Bergman Estates.

Thank you from the BCWT's Board

To maintain and develop the activity of the BCWT is possible thanks to cooperation and good contacts with institutions, organisations and private persons in many countries. In 2014 we received support from the old and new friends, partners, on and outside Gotland

Many thanks to everybody!

Visby, May 2015

Olle Jansson

Janina Orlov

Katarina Krusell

Stefan Ingvarsson

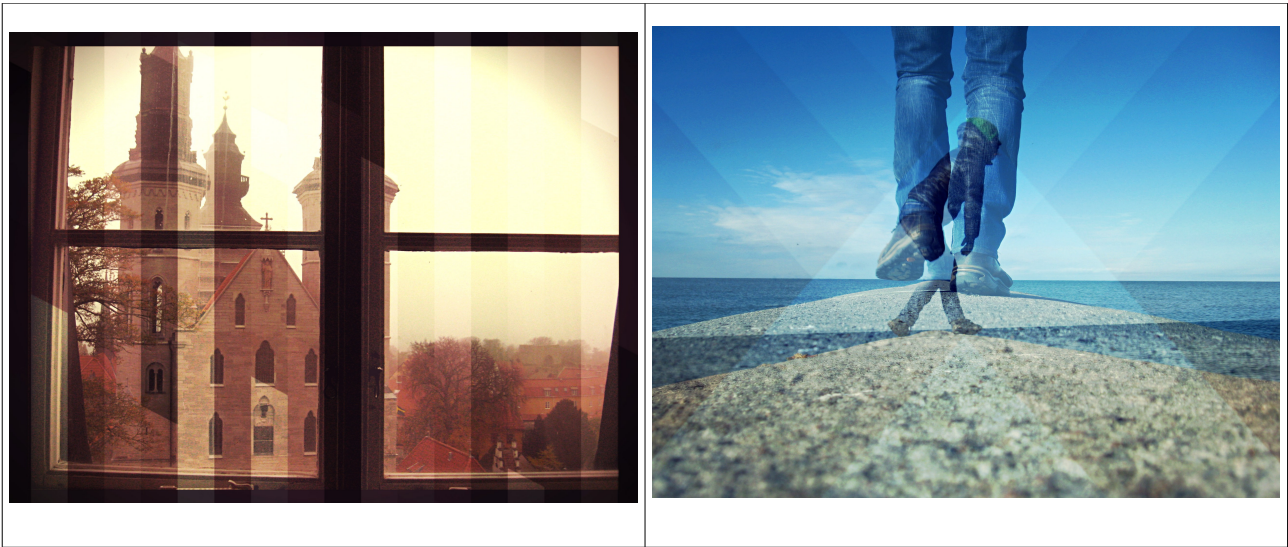
Thomas N. Persson

Yuliya Tsimafejeva

Heidi von Wright

Letters from the North

Jasmina Topić



North

Dear U.,

morning came with the rain. It sounds like the beginning of a novel, right! But there is something you can for sure connect with literature when you try to go into the atmosphere of this island. Maybe because it is so old and full of ruins from one side – churches and defending walls that are surrounding the old part of the city – and on the other side, full of small sweet houses just-like-they-came from some fairy tale. And this is "the other side" of the true North. But, you can still feel in the air that it is North, and then, in the moments of contemplation, while walking along the shore, you almost can say that you are so near to the top of the World; and that the point on the map where the eternal snow begins it's not that far away. I don't like snow, but here, being so close to it, makes me feel excited in a strange way. Somehow, in my poetic imagination, ice that is never melting and the snow all over the landscape is somehow connected with the experience of the eternity. When it comes to imagination, just one look from my window to the gray sea on the horizon, or at least half of the horizon, and I could say that this grayness can easily be seen as some liquid ice. But no, it's not that cold, and not dark at all, I could say that it is almost regular continental November, even with some softness in the air! Sounds maybe strange, because this regularity comes from the fact that it is an island in one of the north seas. Now I am smiling within myself, because so many of you were making jokes how I would be cold – and just for the record, I did catch a cold because of the constant wind.

I should not complain, it was really sunny on the date of my arrival here, so I had a chance to enjoy the view from the airplane. And what a view! I regret that I didn't have a paper and pencil during my flight, because I would for sure have written a good poem – I did write one four days after, but it was not the same moment and not the same poem. I only kept the feeling of being amazed how great and beautiful nature could be, and how many amazing places exist on Earth. So, I was lucky to grasp a piece of this beauty. And the view – it was like the sky was below me with a lot of tiny dark clouds – places where people do live – this is maybe the best description of the land. So much water that you somehow feel that the land is interrupting the Big Blue. Of course, this happened because there was ice ones here that shaped the landscape.

On the third day of my stay – in the foggy Sunday morning - I took my small Canon camera and went out for a long exploring walk within the old part of town; and in my thoughts I just wanted to reach the coast and try to smell the sea, to touch the stones. And I was happy when it happened – the sea was blue gray (without sun to give it that well known green colour) – but it is still a sea, with a lot of black and red stones on something that looked like a beach. Later on, I realized that they are the same stones people here used to plate the streets. The city looked pretty much abandoned, and the only living being I saw near to the local harbor was a really big swan – he looked so unreal in that moment. I've never seen before a swan in the sea waters.

Today, the fog has lifted, but this, I guess, typical grayness remains. Most of my neighbors here in the house of Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators are too quiet and somehow like good students dedicated to their work – I would say maybe pretty too much for writers (or is it that the rebel image of writers is just a good commercial trick!). For me, writing is a creative process that is ON all the time: while you are sleeping, drinking, walking, crying, making love, cooking, having a party all alone in your room with some music you love etc. Or even in the moment that you are not doing a thing. But not the moment were you sit in front of your computer or typing machine and say to yourself: now, I am going to write/create. I will not see the world, or taste all there is to taste in the world, just to work. No, this is then just some regular work. When writing, the whole world with its extremes must be completely present within you, as long as you can hold it – and this is, I think the hardest thing of all. Sometimes I think it is a state of mind similar to suffering, because there are so many things to feel. But I am a poet! - Anyway, I wanted to say something else, ha! About my neighbors – mostly Swedish and some of them from Finland, average age 50. There was one interesting guy from Finland of my age, but he left on the third day of my stay. So, I am here like some exotic creature from the wild South and the wild Balkans! They usually don't have guests like me. Well, for many reasons ;) But, they are all sweet and we are having some good times together.

Like I mentioned there are actually two parts of the city – Visby – the old one and the new one, behind the (ruins) medieval walls. I am still discovering the old part, because my house is here, but when the wind stops I will get on one of the bikes we have here to our disposal and go discover the regular part of the city. Sometimes I have the feeling that these like-in-labyrinth streets are always completely new to me, so it is fun in a way to walk through them all over again. You just go out, and in the same time you are both lost and found – because wherever you go (and you don't know where you are going!) you will somehow come to the same starting point. I like that, it is fun – a feeling that you are walking and playing a mental game of hide and seek with yourself in the same time. I wish I could share these walks here with you, I wish we could look into the same gray but still beautiful sea, and collect together those beautiful black and red stones, or do some pictures, and then go to the small Irish pub maybe - I think you would like that place, and then maybe, to create some new art pieces... And hey, I even wrote my first letter in English. I never ever tried to do that before.

Now, I will go to the other house – in one house there are sleeping rooms for writers & translators and in the other, across the street there are offices, a library, a big kitchen, and in the basement there are rooms with washing machines and even a sauna! I ought to discuss some details with my hosts about the literature evening I will be having here in some 10 days I think, or a possible excursion to Stockholm. I should also make a phone call to a Serbian woman that lives here more then 20 years now, if perhaps I could visit her in Stockholm. We will see, I always feel in a way lazy when I need to cross short distances.

Have a good day,

Jasmina

Days



Dear U.,

I am here for twelve days now, and time goes pretty fast for me. When I wrote you my first letter, I did not have the idea to write another one, but now it seems that it is perfectly logical to make it into a short letter book with impressions of the place and the way I feel here. I was a bit impatient, while waiting for your response to my first letter, and was not sure would you like it, but then, there was this “lost in virtual world“ thing that happened with you not receiving my e-mail. I instantly remembered those message in the bottle stories, and maybe I should try to do that: print the letters, put them in a wine bottle (of course!) and let the sea take them to an uncertain future!

Every day, when I wake up, I have the same view from my window, a big church taking half of my window view and a tiny, usually not sharp, or very hardly seeable line that splits the sea from the horizon. Sometimes, the church is singing to me, I mean to all of us here, because we have the regular belling and then, three times a day, some sort of music that bells make. I am lucky to have a very solid sleep, otherwise I would be waking up at every hour. To make this room with a view more like home, I brought some small candles to put in my window, also some pebbles and pinecones I found in a beautiful place outside of the city. Maybe this is a pure psychology thing, but don't know why, people always have to take something from the beach or forests and take it with them, even if it is just for their temporary residences. Is it a reminder? - that you have been somewhere, existed in some place you would like to keep in your memory or make it as a part of the invisible experience? To have a piece of memory that in a symbolic way could be only yours!

In this moment, some of my most important people are sitting on one island in the south of Europe, drinking beer and wine, celebrating their meeting via Facebook, and here it is almost dark, church is still silent, and I am writing a letter in a different language. Isn't it strange! There are so many perspectives in life. In my case, so many dear people all over the world, relatives and old friends, but also new friends I met and spent time with during my travels. Maybe it would not be that hard to write a novel, maybe soon – just to start and see where it would lead, just as every road can take you somewhere, if you let yourself go. This is why, lately, it is very strange for me when I see that people usually do not let themselves go, they are closing themselves in little shelves, small, in so called secure environment – like an optical illusion. Or I could be wrong, everything could be just an illusion?! But even then, it is better to live an illusion of freedom and courage to step out of yourself and explore you limits / borders then to stay in secured calculations on everyday level.

Now, this is what happens when you start writing, you usually have one concept in the beginning, and then, your thoughts take you to other places. I wanted to write about northern light – not Aurora borealis, because this is too far south for the phenomenon to be seen, but just ordinary, and necessary sunlight that we are all rejoicing. I learned that trick here, every sunny day you should go out and take as much as you can of the warmth and the glow, because you can never know when it appears again. Sun is pure life energy, and here even more significant. But, I cannot complain, local folks say that this November is untypically warm, so I am able to see many beauties of Gotland that the Sun is reflecting on the land.

The other day, I took one of the bikes we have and I was riding along the coast outside of the city, enjoying a sea view – full of small and big rocks that were marking the shore. My companions were mostly birds and a few people with their dogs. Then I reached a very interesting but not that high cliff that looked like another medieval ruin, and I climbed to catch the landscape from above. Of course I was constantly taking photos – this is how the energy of the place affects me, inspiring me to photograph almost every detail. Anyway, when I reached the top of the cliff I discovered a small forest, so I spent some time there walking around, like a happy dog! - feeling in a way liberated from my own thoughts. Underneath the cliff there was a beach, at least it is during summer, with a lot of facilities. This is where the bicycle route ended and I didn't go further, it was enough for one day, but I was happy in a childish way to have made this small secret journey on my own. Maybe because the landscape is so very different from islands in the South, or maybe not – but in my experience it certainly is. If you count in the sea in this experience, it could be only special, as it is always in my case.

When I am not outside, discovering surroundings, I am writing letters! All right, not only letters. I have finished some applications, as usual, writing poetry and working on what is already written, and every night I go down in the basement, in the house across the street, practicing some Nordic skiing on the machine. Some writers here say snuff (Swedish tobacco) help them to focus, some are drinking when nobody sees them, I think (or at least I am sure about the tee!) and I am running towards the same white wall with white tiles he he! It is good to exercise, not only for the body but to practice your strength of will to do something so boring as running, even on the machine. In the main house (where mostly everything is happening) there is a big library, I mention that in my first letter. It is always nice to be surrounded with books, but my misfortune is in the fact that I can hardly find any that I can understand – they are mostly in one of Nordic languages, and languages of the Baltic area. Here and there, there are some English translations, and German. So I took some of Latvian poetry translated into English, one novel from Henry Miller, German grammar and two novels in German, just to practice. I have decided to read them, these ones in German, even if I am capable to understand only five percent of the text. Just to try to catch the meaning in the sound of the words and context. It should be at least interesting experiment. Somehow, I have a feeling that learning a language should basically start with listening of the melodies of words. And this whole year, for me, was learning how to use two languages constantly at the same time, English and Serbian, and also try to grasp as much as I can of German. So, maybe, writing these letters in English is a logic continuation. Anyway, speaking of books, a writer must be surrounded by some books, even if it is hard to understand their contents – so this is why I have some ten books in my room!

This week there is Gotland Pride week going on, and I was really surprised, starting from the fact that there are rainbow flags on the top of the main church here – Visby Domkyrka, it is totally untypical! – and also due to the fact that this is not a very densely populated island. I mean, I was out the other week with two writers and Saturday night here does not look like party time! Cafes were almost empty. Maybe if I find some company among younger writers who arrived recently, we will go to see if there is some party closing the event – because there was no carnival on the street.

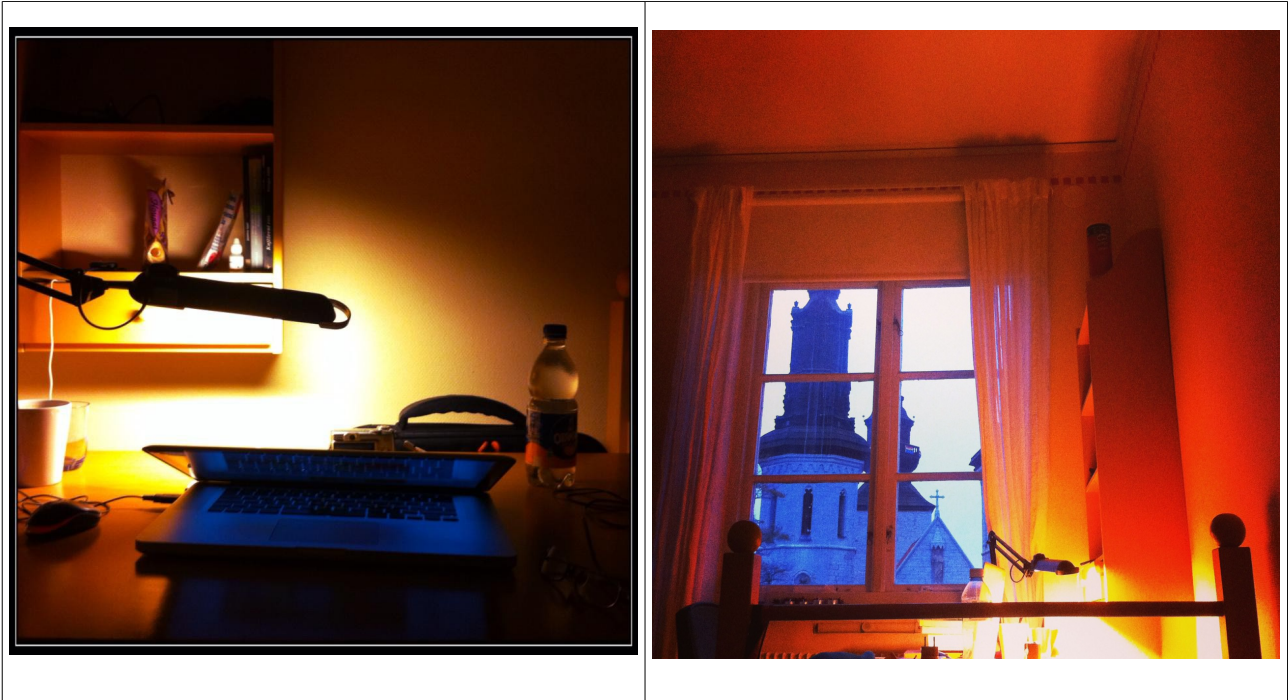
Tonight, we will have our second dinner together, and I am contributing with some risotto with tuna fish and vegetables. It is a nice way to relax from work and to exchange some interesting stories or experiences. And next week will be my reading. I have five poems translated from Serbian in to Swedish and after reading them, we will talk about the Balkan literature scene and play my poetry videos.

Write to you soon!

Jasmina



Event(s)



Dear U.,

The last chapter of my time here just started. In that name (or as a good excuse!) I have finally opened a bottle of a local beer – Wisby klosteröl from Gotlands bryggeri. It should make me a bit closer to you as a person who likes this type of drink. I can tell you it has a very nice taste, so in a way I am drinking it for both of us! I always like to support local products, and it is a good way to be connected with the place of some, or any, temporary residence. Also, I could say, at the moment, it is a small ritual of celebration, because of a very successful evening – presentation of my poetry I had last night. So, it started with a slide show of some photos I took here, like a picturesque and poetic introduction of my work. After that, the plan was to do some conversation before the reading, including some politic topics, at least my host here thought it is always an issue when it comes to the Balkan region. But, we talked mostly about how artist from ex-YU communicate, and do we – we do! – have a good cooperation, despite the past. I guess it was somehow necessary to “touch” the subject, but now, I think I am glad we did it, because I believe I had a positive approach concerning the issue. Maybe it did show how small cultures and this region with basically the same languages need to cooperate; and to think more of a present time than the past, at least when it comes to art.

The reading part was really interesting, first it was me reading in Serbian, and then the same poems were read in Swedish by Kale, a young guy that is working with Lena Pasternak, our main coordinator here. A good distinction between male and female voices that made the reading more interesting. I also decided to read two poems in English, for those people who came to my presentation, and don't speak neither Serbian or Swedish. According to the reactions and comments after the official part, people did like my poetry, and had some very interesting impressions and interpretations. Especially an older gentleman who liked my poem *In third language* – if you remember this one? I did send you a translation in German this winter. I revealed a secret about the poem to him, that the title could also mean “language of desire”! But that is poetry, so many variations and possibilities of understanding what is written. This is why I really love poetry, not only to write but also to read. A poem can really have many variations of meaning, and very

different emotions as well. To finish this short report, for the last part of the presentation we played my video works – inspired by my poems. After that it was a nice evening with drinking wine, having some snacks and enjoying by the fire and some Serbian ethnic music, of course! But I think everyone were satisfied and had a really god time. Just for the record, it was not totally understandable to read in Serbian, because it happened that there was one guy in the audience coming from Bosnia, and this made me happy.

I have already spoken about this a bit crazy state of mind, listening and using different languages, but now, somehow, I got used to it, like I have a switch on/off button for Serbian or English – and everything is mostly about how much you can feel the language that you are using as medium of communication – as long as we understand each other that is enough, and as long as we are able to share some of our thoughts and dreams & ideas. Even feelings! No, especially feelings!

Another thing for today, I think I finally decided to skip Stockholm. I was really struggling with this decision – should I go or should I stay – like in that popular punk song! It is maybe a once in a lifetime opportunity to go and see it, but on the other hand I saw it from air, it was somehow more exciting for me. I know myself. I would be, mostly, like a really stupid tourist looking in the buildings without having a clue about the stories behind facades, or enough time to feel the energy of the place; or learn more about history, art etc. But, another reason, I guess I'm feeling now too tired from constant travellings I have had this year, and in my thoughts, I am already back home. I don't count Graz in that feeling of being tired – because it is like a second home. Now, when I think about it, I am sure that there will be some other occasion for me and Stockholm to meet!

Maybe I needed to stop for a moment in this part of the letter, to ask myself am if I'm sure of my decision? Or the emotional perspective of the letter changed because I am listening to a song Californication from RHCP in an unplugged version of a tribute band called Orto Pilot – I like their covers of popular songs, with a hint of hidden melancholy in the voice of the singer. Music can really teleport you to other levels of existence! But it is a beginning of a different kind of journey. Just now I remembered our karaoke night, how beautifully spontaneous that was, and how relaxing. It is a good memory. Hope that time will somehow come again. The other day I wrote a Facebook status of how there is really some kind of synchronicity between things and people, and how every asked question is calling for an answer, or every longing and emotion is asking to be materialized. This is what happened to me, to explain the principle – I saw a very interesting photo of a woman on a piano we have here in a big guest room in the Baltic centre. Her face was partly covered by smoke coming out from the cigarette she had in her hand. In front of her there was a very nicely decorated cup of tee. She looked both present and absent, and like she doesn't care that someone is taking photos of her. I was wondering who she was, and I was only sure that she is a writer. I was not bothered with the question but it stayed somehow in the air. And the answer came day after, when someone posted a poem with an almost identical picture – it was Wisława Szymborska, a famous Polish poet and a Nobel prize winner. And I had my answer! Maybe it will sound childish to you, but it is something that I do believe in! As a poet, I should be at least a bit of a dreamer or an idealist. It does sound like stereotype, but in my case, don't think so.

For reasons that I can't explain to myself anymore, and lately, I am not even trying, I do still put a lot of mental energy into my communication with you, and I do feel that we do have this bound somehow, even with all these “empty” places / periods of time, living in different cities and countries. It is something that is constantly “on line”; It is like I am sure that you would write a line or two, to me, if I would stop and vice versa. Ok, I do usually write more then a line! :) Do you think the same? Do you think about it at all?! Throughout the history of literature people did wrote letters, a lot of them. Some writers / philosophers became an extremely good friends, helping each other through letters, discussing important topics, exchanging ideas and they never ever met – they stayed letter buddies, we would call it like that today. My personal history of writing letters started

differently but I realized how interesting they could be, not only personally, but from the point of view of literature – today it could be not only a letter but also an essay, poetry in prose, travels journal...

It is a late hour, but it has been dark for some time now, days became very short – of light. Here, I learned to recognize a different levels and varieties of grey, I never thought I could. But, it will be something to describe in my last letter from here.

Stay well and keep in mind that honesty is often scary,
but also liberating.

Yours,

Jasmina



New horizon and home again



Dear U.,

as it usually happens in life, as soon as you decide to stop torment yourself with hard decisions or uncertainties, and let go of it, then it starts to happen – the way that you put your energy into it in the first place. Now, I did complicate my statement with first sentence! I wanted to say, well, I gave up of Stockholm and here I am, writing 4th letter from Stockholm, actually from a place called Vallunda – one of the northern municipalities of the city. Local folks say, a place full of Swedish & Viking history. I met Vesna, my host, a very nice Serbian woman, and we will go tomorrow to see this Venice in the North, before I take my evening plane home. Speaking of airplanes, I woke up on an extremely windy morning, I was scared how will my flight look like. It was so windy that people barely manage to stay on their feet boarding in to the plane. Taking off was bumpy, yet not that bad, but the landing on Arlanda airport was awful! – it felt like I'm on tumble dry program! I got out of the plane totally under stress!

I said goodbye to my very nice companions in Visby. It was not only that they were a good companions, but I also learned some important lessons considering writing – they are all novelist, except me, and so they did encouraged me to try to write a novel too. I always had a feeling this is a really big responsibility, and you cannot make mistakes, but coming from them, I learned I should be more relaxed and just go for it. Beside my fellow writers, I also met a very interesting Hungarian woman, Livia, art historian, working in a Baltic art center in Visby and had a good time chatting with her & making traditional Swedish apple pie. For the record, it was delicious! So for a moment I was a bit of Swede myself! Also, I had a very interesting communication with Lena, coordinator in Baltic centre, and I felt mentally & emotionally connected with her. I said to her that I will miss her – it is always important to say what you feel! Strangely, how sometimes you can develop good friendship with someone, or at least a good start, in a very short period of time, and then you leave to continue other journeys and stories in life. But this doesn't mean that connections you established and people you spent time with are less valuable, even though some of them you'll never meet again. I did played this game – asking myself a question, just like I did asked you: will I see this person again! Intuitive answer was: yes! – maybe ones or twice, and maybe maybe someday it will

be some good cooperation. So, it will take some time to find out am I right.

I mentioned I will write about grey varieties of the Baltic sky, but new pictures always cover up old ones, like new adventures make us forget the previous ones. But, I can say that there is something special about the light in the North for sure. It is never regular blue, or grey, or what ever could come in between – it is difficult to explain, because you just simply stare in to the light, enchanted. Maybe this was the reason for having a very strong need to play with photography; like it came, somehow, very naturally to write in English – although it is not quite regular one! From this perspective, I can maybe say more about lights in Stockholm – especially crazy orange color of the sun reflected on closeby buildings (with also very lively colors!); How my thoughts were somewhere over orange clouds, how short it all was. It was sunny maybe one hour or less, yet magnificent. But that special gray base was constant. Here. In November. They say that summer can be really beautiful, both in Stockholm and on Gotland, and surprisingly warm – or just, let us say, regularly warm.

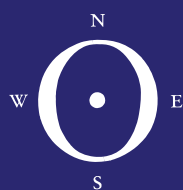
The rhythm of Visby was calm and peaceful for me, this observation goes for sure with the atmosphere of the island, but Stockholm was not that different, it's just everything is bigger. I had only four-five hours to see the city, so I could say it is really interesting, but to really feel the place you need to spend more time. Stockholm was like a dream, and Visby – reality!

Last part of my letters obviously had to stay for post festum impressions. I am home again – although nobody trust me when I say probably for longer period of time. My friends are expecting from me to go to some other place soon. Maybe they see something that I cannot! Coming back home brought some health problems for me – high blood pressure and strange type of anxiety. I am thinking of how this absolutely different perspective of life and climate in Sweden may have affected this problem, or it was to much of emotions to handle. I hope it will be alright soon. I had a lot of emotional stress last year, but being surrounded by different types of beauty can also be stressful; also this feeling of constant *let go* of people that you connect with. If I could have you all here in one place, that would be perfect! But I learned to live with the feeling of missing dear people, especially after my sister and one of my oldest friends left Serbia. And now, I feel that I am also in the constant “state” of traveling – sometimes in my thoughts and often for real. It is like a snowslipe, when it starts crushing down the mountain, there is nothing to stop it.

I learned some important lessons by gathering my impressions. You were also a part of my journey through these letters – and had your piece of North and Sweden that you like so much. And, like we learned to say, we won't say goodbye, but see you soon.

Hugs!

Jasmina



BALTIC CENTRE *for* WRITERS *and* TRANSLATORS

UDDENS GRÄND 3 · 621 56 VISBY · SWEDEN

WWW.BCWT.ORG