

LITERARY EXCHANGE DURING LOCKDOWN IN 2020

INTERNATIONAL LITERARY PEN PALS
IN THE BIRTH YEAR OF COVID-19



Ulysses' Shelter

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IN THE BIRTH YEAR OF COVID-19



Društvo slovenskih pisateljev
Slovene Writers' Association

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Published by **Slovene Writers' Association**, Ljubljana
Dušan Merc, President

First digital edition

Ljubljana 2022

<https://tovar.hr/>

Kataložni zapis o publikaciji (CIP) pripravili v Narodni in
univerzitetni knjižnici v Ljubljani

COBISS.SI-ID 112926467

ISBN 978-961-6995-87-0 (ePUB)

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FOREWORD

July 17, 2022

It is 2020 and a warm summer is upon us. Temperatures are rising, and for the past two months we have been able to roam around the city of Ljubljana, Slovenia, liberated from having to wear masks. Smiles or frowns are again clearly drawn on passing faces. Masks are stowed in purses or trouser pockets, left lying in cars or hanging from rear-view mirrors.

But the fear produced by the Covid-19 virus is still present. It has merely changed its appearance. It has morphed into a – personal or public – conversational topic. Otherwise (for now) it has lost its power. Despite the fact that we are all trying to forget about it as we go through our daily lives, official and media statistics, among other things, remind us of it.

'Five infections in Cerknica. Kacin speaks of restrictions on gatherings'

rtvslo.si, July 7, 2020

'560 tests, 14 infections. Kacin: "Parties, picnics and weddings are leading sources for new hotspots'

rtvslo.si, July 12, 2020

'Fresh data. 10 new infections confirmed on Monday, including a kindergarten assistant in Hrastnik'

rtvslo.si, July 14, 2020

In spite of all that, we breathed a little easier during these summer months. Restrictions on crossing municipal borders in Slovenia have disappeared. Regional ones too. Ordinary

citizens can once again cross national borders. With the Covid-19 virus, such borders re-emerged in the European Union. But now it's summer. Although the city is veiled by haze and humidity, and temperatures are approaching heat wave levels, we breathe more easily. And we continue to breathe. And we breathe without masks.

With the summer and the dropping of protective mask requirements, the Slovene Writers' Association hopes that we and our project partners will be able to carry out the international residency program Ulysses' Shelter 2, intended for young literary creators and translators from five different countries: Croatia, Great Britain and Wales, Greece, Serbia, and Slovenia. I'm in the office, sending emails again with great enthusiasm, and asking the key question: 'When would be the best time for you to spend your residency in Ljubljana?' and 'Do you meet the RVT conditions (Recovered - Vaccinated - Tested)?' I am gradually receiving their answers and the timeline of our young literary guests for the rest of the 2020 year is finished. And I, too, can go in good conscience on my own holiday - out of town and near some water.

July 20-9 August 2022

From: Nataša Čebular <natasa.cebular@drustvo-dsp.si>

Date: Thu, Jul 23, 2020 at 2:31 PM

Subject: Obvestilo o odsotnosti / Out of office notice

To: Undisclosed Recipients

Pozdravljeni,

trenutno nisem v pisarni in se vrnem v ponedeljek, 10. 8. 2020. Za nujne zadeve prosim pišite na dsp@drustvo-dsp.si.

- - - - -

Dear Madam or Sir,

I'll be out of office till Monday, the 10th of August. For urgent matters please write to dsp@drustvo-dsp.si.

Lep pozdrav/Kind regards,

Nataša Čebular

[Strokovna sodelavka v pisarni Društva slovenskih pisateljev](#)

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Slovene Writers' Association
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e-mail:dsp@drustvo-dsp.si
<https://www.drustvo-dsp.si/>

August 15, 2020

In a post-holiday spirit and with recharged batteries, I am again glued to the phone, regularly following the news.

'17 infections confirmed on Monday, at least 8 of them from abroad'

rtvslo.si, August 11, 2020

'29 new cases, most from abroad / Beović for stricter rules on the border with Croatia'

rtvslo.si, August 13, 2020

'15 confirmed infections, at least 8 of them imported. Tightening of Croatian border increasingly likely'

rtvslo.si, rtvslo.si, August 16, 2020

'Tuesday's tests confirmed 37 new infections, again mostly among young people'

rtvslo.si, August 19, 2020

August 20, 2020

I turn on the television and see that the Slovenian media and state representatives have started urging holidaymakers to return home as soon as possible.

'43 newly discovered infections / The highest jump in infections since April 3. Slovenj Gradec enters the white zone'

rtvslo.si, August 20, 2020

'National Institute of Public Health: Most imported infections from Croatia, almost three quarters brought in by young people'

rtvslo.si, August 22, 2020

'34 infections confirmed on Saturday after 760 tests'

rtvslo.si, August 23, 2020

'Hojs: Between Saturday and Monday, about 60,000 Slovenian citizens returned from Croatia'

'When crossing the border with Croatia, a 14-day quarantine is now mandatory. However, this does not yet apply to some of the exceptions set out in the decree. Without imports from abroad, Slovenia would have significantly fewer infections, says Government spokesperson Kacin'

rtvslo.si, August 25, 2020

Unbelievable! In order to make the appeals of government representatives as effective as possible, they introduced milder criteria for crossing the border back to Slovenia: 'If you return by August 25, 2020, you do not have to quarantine for 14 days.'

At the same time, we all skimmed the news headlines – travel from one country to another will probably not be possible this year either. In all probability, regional and municipal border restrictions will also return, or even the shutting down of public transport throughout the country, as well as the general cessation of social and business life.

And what does this now mean for the international residency project Ulysses' Shelter 2 and for our young literary creators in this project? I don't know. And no one at the Slovene Writers' Association knows either. We are again overwhelmed by a feeling of uncertainty about what will follow and how things will unfold over the coming months.

August 25, 2020

Uncertainty about the coming months is on the rise. The official numbers of those infected are also rising. At the Slovene Writers' Association, after a thorough consideration of the Ulysses' Shelter 2 project, we realize we have no choice but to try to bring together our young literary guests online in activities that will bring them closer to Slovenian literature and to the literary scene. So we came up with an idea: the Literary Exchange. In keeping with their literary interests and literary profile, we connected each young literary creator with a young Slovenian artist online. Thus, five literary couples were formed, who connected – one way or another – through the internet, the only world that remained open and without borders. They wrote emails to each other, some talked through audio-visual media, others threw themselves into joint personal projects or experimented with translations of poems. Each in their own way. Each in a unique way.

What follows is the correspondence they produced during the subsequent dark and lonely autumn and winter

months.

A few years later, around May 25, 2022, or a little something about this e-book

This e-book represents a cross-section of external and internal events from each young literary creator in the months between August 2020 and the end of 2020. It consists of five chapters, each offering a unique insight into the artists' lives, thinking and fears in the last quarter of 2020, that is, in the year Covid-19 was born.

At the end of the book, there is a short reflection by the young literary creators on the guest performances carried out in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Then there is a short presentation of all the literary correspondents.

By way of conclusion, let me just say that, rather than being a work of fiction, this publication merely reflects a shocking year and all the situations directly or indirectly related to the acute Covid-19 situation that cast its shadow over all areas of our lives, including the literary and literature itself.

CHAPTER 1: ELUNED GRAMICH AND KATJA ZAKRAJŠEK

“

One of the speakers quoted the Orwellian line, ‘Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past’. I suppose every nation has ghosts from its past that keep being used as stakes in current politics [...].

Katja Zakrajšek

PARALLELS BETWEEN THE LANGUAGE POSITIONS OF SLOVENIAN AND WELSH

Subject: Greetings from Wales

Date: Mon, 31 Aug 2020 08:57:22 +0100

From: Eluned Gramich

To: katja zakrajsek

CC:

Dear Katja,

Živjo![1](#)

Things have calmed down a little in my world - after moving house and the rest. Not sure how things are with you? I hope this is a slightly better time to start the email exchange for you too. How are your translation projects going?

Recently, I've been thinking more and more about language learning... I'm working on a short story about a widow in her sixties who visits her son in Munich. She decides to learn German there, and through it she discovers new freedoms and joys. It's possibly too idealistic and rosy a picture, but personally I don't think it's too far from the truth, do you? When you live in another country, learning its language is practically, instantly, surprisingly rewarding - as well as hard work. When I lived in Tokyo, every month I spent learning Japanese was a kind of revelation: the streets opening up to me daily as I began to read the signs around me, and understand what was being said to me in cafes and shops. In Japan, especially, you are always being addressed, even when you enter the smallest corner shop - *Irrashaimase!* Welcome and please come in!