

# Where have you been to lately?

## Travelling through literature

*Justyna Czechowska*

Most of us have spent up to two years sitting at home, not able to travel, for either work or pleasure, due to the pandemic. And now that trains are back on track and the skies are open to planes, many of us are pondering if it's really necessary to travel, if we can't just hold a meeting on Zoom, if our home surroundings are not just as beautiful and as worth exploring as faraway places.

**“Is it really necessary to travel?”**

Some are worried about their financial situation. Others, like the Swedes, who invented the concept of *flygskam* are ashamed about flying for environmental reasons. Since February 2022, some of us living in Poland are wondering if donating money to Ukrainian refugees is not a more humane act than spending it on our personal vacations. Of course,

millions of Ukrainian women and children (among them translators and writers) have travelled simply because they were forced to flee for their safety.

Most Polish **literary residencies** have revised their target groups – instead of inviting artists from all over the world, they are giving shelter, a quiet, safe place, to Ukrainian writers and translators, for a week, or a month or a couple of months. The Polish Literary Translators Association, **STL**, and its sister association of Polish writers, The Literary Union, **SUL**, have created a data base of volunteers called ‘**Welcome to our colleagues from Ukraine**’ who offer assistance in various ways: help with administrative matters, looking for work, teaching Polish or simply meeting for a walk or a coffee.

“**Translators are saving the world**”, Nobel prize winner Olga Tokarczuk claimed.

So, how are they doing it?



*Justyna Czechowska, at the statue of Selma Lagerlöf, Sunne, Sweden  
Photo: Rafał Polkowski*

### Translator heroes

Aneta Kamińska, Bohdan Zadura, Michał Petryk, Marcin Gaczkowki, Katarzyna Kotyńska, Agnieszka Sowińska, Maciej Piotrowski, Walery Butewicz, Anna Korzeniowska-Bihun, Adam Pomorski, and Anna Łazar. These are all my Polish colleagues who have made their work a mission – a mission to translate as much Ukrainian literature as possible, which is in greater demand than ever before. But the mission has an even greater meaning, which is to save this literature for the world and for readers. Translating means losing something, as we all well know, but it also saves other things, which we all too often forget.

If I have managed to awaken your curiosity, have a look at some of the writing and translating

heroes at [#freeallwords](#) and at the [Russian Oppositional Arts Review](#). Another great source of information on Ukrainian literature is the web site of [Ukrainian PEN](#).

**“Translation loses something but also saves other things”**

The world must be saved and although it might sound naïve, I do believe that we, and hopefully we are many, can manage to do so with literature’s help.



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**Covers of translations**  
**Photo: Justyna Czechowska**

### Travelling in literature

Where have I been to lately? To Eastern Siberia at the end of the nineteenth century – with the Norwegian writer Roy Jacobsen, his Polish translator Iwona Zimnicka and his Polish publisher, Poznanskie. In spring, I travelled to Australia and Trobriand Island with the great anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. I spent time on the Canary Islands and in the Italian mountains, thanks to the Swedish author, Agneta Pleijel. I also stayed on the Finnish archipelago with Tove Jansson for a couple of months. In early autumn I walked through the centre of Stockholm accompanying

Therese Bohman in her latest novel *Andromeda*. Travelling in literature is absolutely wonderful, much cheaper and less tiring than the real thing. Now the only way to travel to Lviv, Charkiv, Kiev and Odessa is to have a look at the texts by Bogdan Kolomiichuk, Svitlana Taratorina, Serhiy Zhadan, Olena Pavlova, Oles Ilchenko, Hanna Kostenko, or the first Ukrainian urban novel, *The City*, by [Valerian Pydmohylny](#).

So, where have you been to lately?  
And where are you going to next?