

## A note to reading the Fifth Syllable of the Missive

*For the annual meeting of the Slovene PEN Centre at Bled, 2020*

Just as the epidemic lockdown (the worst period in our part of Europe was between 15 March and 15 May!) reminded us of our gardens and the balcony plants, so too have all of us, book-devotees, become aware of the necessity of dedicating ourselves to the vitality of this primary cultural nutrition through renewed consciousness. Speaking for myself as an author, I “woke up” to some topical accents in my writing. With a certain amount of adrenaline in our blood, poetry can contribute to our life perspective here on earth. And, most importantly, it can drive away the fear in people’s hearts and can strap wings to their shoulders.

I wrote these little real-time bits when movement in Trieste was restricted to only a few hundred metres from our dwellings, and when the Slovene-Italian border, only seven kilometres away from my home, was impermeably closed.

In my Missives, I rejected this aggression (the virus and some other more or less spontaneous rulers) with humour, with eros, with poetic texts that were to provide some reading pleasure to anxious people, while encouraging all others to read as well. The Reading Badge Society has had a long tradition in Slovenia, and it has proven to be of particular relevance during this historic episode as well. We needed to maintain people-to-people relations and the erotic enthusiasm of the mentors, who we consider our colleagues — 7,000 of whom are involved in our mission every year. I was well aware of this fact in Trieste. Having confidence in the liberating power of poetry, I therefore wrote twelve public letters. They circulated on the Net, whereupon, already in June, they were published in a chapbook, alongside erotic drawings by the Trieste painter Klavdij Palčič.

Let them now serve as an inspiration of self-esteem for the PEN community across the world. There is a self-awareness that tends, during periods of crisis, to be expressed in a creative fashion, but only in a manner that makes us recognise, yet again, the immense value our closest compassionate creatures—books—have for maintaining living ties in our society!

*Written by a Trieste poet and the President of The Slovenian Reading Badge Society*

MARKO KRAVOS

*Translated from the Slovene by Andrej Pleterski*



**THE MISSIVE**  
**in Twelve Syllables**

**Marko Kravos**  
**Klavdij Palčič**

# the **FIFTH** Syllable

and the Fifth Connecting Thread for the female members  
of the Reading Badge and the few champions of reading  
in Slovenia belonging to the masculine gender

There are fairy tales capable of clipping the tail of time: like  
Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*; and there are fairy tales  
where the hero has to leave their home and go to the end of the world;  
where the herdsman travels to get snake milk, and ends up marrying a  
princess. Even the herdsman needs to travel.  
And the living story tricked the great vizier, Time. Long before  
Einstein's discovery.

We have got stacks of time for ourselves these days since our ways from  
our threshold no longer lead uphill and down dale to the Ninth Land  
along the shores of the Seventh Sea.  
Thus, the specific weight of the body is increasing. Don't give in  
to idleness! Jump, jump out of the strict circle by means of the  
imagination that launches you to great heights!  
There, you can treat yourself to the cushion of dreams, to Turkish  
debauchery, to Arabic lattice multiplication, even to the fleas in your  
ears, and to what not, there, among the clouds.  
We master all this thanks to reading books, thus maintaining  
limberness in the joints of our souls.

*Still, what will become of the cherry tree, what will become of her red earrings when her time comes in May?  
Should I distract her with an online fairy tale to make her delay her ripening and wait?  
Should I tell the magpies and jays to bring me a fruit or two?  
None of them is online yet —unlike every schoolchild nowadays—so I'm not able to tell them about this.  
I know, they will eat them up by themselves! As birds cannot read, not even a written ban will do.  
They may, indeed, exist in poems and fairy tales, but they do not let themselves be dissuaded  
from the delicious cherries, neither by a word nor a fairy tale.*

*Ach, to be Scheherazade! To extricate oneself from the claws of anxiety by means of the imagination ...  
Well, and then—at least in your dreams—go and pick cherries for yourself,  
bite on them and spit out their stones far, far away.*

Time is passing in the meanwhile.

I am spitting out the little stones of words and I am having a good time.  
Do have a good time yourselves, too. And when you have had your fill of  
time, do spit your little stones out, too. It helps.  
Sometimes already on April the first, sometimes not until later,  
a magpie brings you a cherry in its beak as a gift.

*It is going to be hard!  
How am I going to greet someone without a handshake from now on?  
How am I going to kiss you without touching your lips?  
How am I going to turn a page in a book without licking my finger?*



I am piling a syllable after a syllable to bewitch evil  
while the rooster declares one more time  
**STAY AT HOME**  
Open the window for the sun, open the book for the heart!

6 April 2020