

Winston Churchill McNeish Fellowship Report

Background

My fellowship project was to spend the month of June 2023 in the ancient city of Pécs as a guest of the Hungarian Writers' Residency at the Zsolnay Cultural Quarter, working towards my second collection of short stories, which is themed around the concept of 'delight'.



The Zsolnay Cultural Quarter, Pécs

Detailed information about the fellowship, including additional photographs, can be found in these blog posts:

- <https://www.kathrynvaneek.co.nz/blog/hungarian-writers-residency>
- <https://www.kathrynvaneek.co.nz/blog/last-night-in-pecs>

What was the overall value of the experience?

It's important for writers to be exposed to different cultures, histories, experiences and ideas. This helps provide texture and details for writing: for example, I am currently working on a story that includes berry soup, iridescent ceramics and stink bugs – three details I can only write about having experienced them during the residency. Travel also prompts us to *think* in ways we haven't thought before. Being on the European continent during a time of war and

climate peril meant I thought deeply about these topics. I can now bring new layers of understanding to my writing.



The Festival of Light. The arts are front and centre of Hungarian life

Being in different environments and experiencing the cultural wealth that Hungary has to offer was valuable, as was having enriching conversations with other writers and being reminded that no matter where we live, at heart we have much in common.



There was a lot of art to see and experience

In the short to medium term, the experience provided me with the opportunity to write, to be inspired, and to develop ideas for future writing. Longer term, the experience – which included overcoming cultural differences and language barriers, adjusting to different social

norms, and gaining a deeper understanding of human history – will enrich my writing for the rest of my career.

I would recommend the Hungarian Writers Residency to any New Zealand writer wanting to develop their craft and challenge their thinking. I am so grateful that the Winston Churchill McNeish Fellowship enabled me to take up this opportunity.

How my horizons were broadened: How the experience influenced or addressed the questions, challenges or opportunities outlined in my application.

Due to COVID-19 and other challenges, we have all been through a tough few years. Part of my motivation behind writing short stories with a theme of ‘delight’ is to provide a balm for troubled times. My time in Hungary was jam-packed with delightful details that will make their way into my stories. Streaming through fields of sunflowers on a train, sampling raspberry ganache at a gilded café, and searching for exotic creatures in the forest are just some of the delightful moments I will be able to share.



Following in the paw prints of a wolf... and then writing about it

The serendipity that often makes travel so enjoyable also broadened my horizons. Along with working towards my collection of short stories, I also wrote an essay about a wolf that had recently made a record-breaking journey from Switzerland to Hungary. This essay would not have eventuated without several fortuitous encounters I had before and during

the residency. I even had the opportunity to interview a wolf expert from the World Wildlife Foundation. When I set out on my fellowship I hadn't expected to start writing essays, but this is a new direction that I'm enjoying pursuing.

What are my recommendations on the residency?

The residency exceeded my expectations. I stayed in the Zsolnay Cultural Quarter, an historic ceramics factory turned arts centre. The support I received from the residency coordinator, and from the cultural quarter employees, was outstanding and very helpful. Everyone I met was polite and kind. I do not have any recommendations for improvement.



Last days at the Zsolnay Cultural Quarter

Thank you

Thank you so much for enabling me to take up the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of a writing residency in Hungary.