

**KREMS / AIR**  
*Report March 2020*

If you want to make God laugh, tell him about your plans. Woody Allen's quote for 2020 could be: if you want to make Covid-19 laugh, tell him about your plans.

I arrived to Krems in early March 2020 for a one month-long residence with a clear plan: write screenplay for a feature film and create basic concept for my new book - collection of short stories; and explore the cultural scene in Krems and landscapes in Niederösterreich. I was supposed to have reading sessions and discussions in Vienna, Salzburg and at the book fair in Leipzig, because my first novel *Once in Lošonc* (2015) was published by Austrian publishing house Zsolnay with a new title *Zusammen sind wir unbesiegbar* (2020). However, the pandemic changed everything - not only my plans, but also our perception of health, fear, paranoia or beautiful little thing of our past lives. Our days turned into an episode of *Black Mirror*. The residence ended prematurely and I was forced to return home to Slovakia.

Nevertheless, my short stay in Krems was very intense and pleasant. The sunny and quiet apartment with a view on the Danube, the railway bridge and the Benedictine monastery of Göttweig gave me a great shelter and conditions for writing. Krems is a charming and inspiring small town full of life, colors and memories: narrow streets, cafes, galleries, strange buildings of prison, quiet trees, roofs of old houses. I enjoyed the gastronomy and a visit of the gallery of modern art. The approach of the AIR team was very friendly and professional; I felt very well and comfortable. Although the situation around the pandemic get worse, AIR members regularly informed me of everything and did not panic. The interaction with other residents-artists was also pleasant and stimulating. I appreciate the attitude of the Literaturhaus Niederösterreich and the whole AIR-Team. Thank you very much.

During my stay in Krems I tried to write the screenplay for a feature film called *Mother of the Night*. It's my favorite genre - psychological horror. I work on it together with talented, award-winning director Peter Czinkai and producer Michal Kollár. The film tells a scary folk tale about strange mother-daughter relationship. The story is situated in an isolated community on the southern border of Slovakia, in a land of deep forests, fields and raw landscape. The story works with the phenomenon of witchcraft in Central and Eastern Europe and explores topics of evil, segregation and fear of the unknown. Of course, the situation around the coronavirus and the paranoia also affected the final version of the script. During residence I also tried to create a concept for my new book - collection of short, bizarre and haunting stories; one magic realism story will be situated into strange Austrian small town and will have a title "Death in Krems".

Despite the circumstances, I enjoyed my stay in Krems. It was a stimulating and interesting

experience. At the residence I would welcome the opportunity to have a reading sessions or discussion in public in Krems. Everything else was great. Except for the pandemic (ha-ha). I hope that I will return to Krems in future under the more pleasant and calmer circumstances.

Sincerely,

*Peter Balko*