



# P A N E L

May 2018 / Issue # 1



---

"It seemed Budapest was melting" - a short story "City of Smiles" by Matthew Daintrey-Hall

---

Poetry in two languages

---

"The experience of the car, like the experience of living abroad, ends in a return, although it is seldom the return we expect" - an essay by Duncan Robertson

---

Home, National Identity and Family in Contemporary Baltic literature

---

An interview with Georgian writer Zurab Karumidze

---

[www.panel-magazine.com](http://www.panel-magazine.com)

Contemporary  
writing and  
arts from Central  
Eastern Europe



**Panel is a Budapest-based literary magazine of fiction, poetry, non-fiction and the arts, currently being produced in Central Eastern Europe. We are open to collaboration with artists and writers from the region.**

Get in touch.  
[panel-magazine.com](http://panel-magazine.com)  
[panel.editors@gmail.com](mailto:panel.editors@gmail.com)



Photo by Eszter Fruzina

## *Editorial note*



This is the first issue of Panel, a literary magazine whose aim is to showcase some of the best in contemporary English language literature, translation, non-fiction and art to be found in Central and Eastern Europe.

It always comes as a bit of surprise when something that exists only as an idea, as a topic to discuss among friends and colleagues ('why not start a magazine, eh?') takes form, accumulates mass and, all of a sudden, comes to life. In the case of Panel, it required a then unsubstantiated confidence that our corner of the world was rich with talented writers working in English. It also required a good deal of old fashioned elbow grease.

We want to thank anyone who was kind enough to submit their poetry prose or art for consideration, since, without them, this magazine would have been an impossibility. While we put together the first issue, we were amazed by the quality and a variety of work being submitted. Now we can safely say that our hope and faith were not misplaced.

The theme for this first issue, 'home', was suggested and accepted on practically the first day we met to discuss the possibility of actually putting out a magazine. It's a theme about place, and in a region so diverse and rich in its languages, cultures and people, we felt it was the perfect way to inaugurate Panel. It should also be noted that it is an appropriate theme for a magazine edited and assembled by a group of people that are far away from their own homes, and have become accustomed to new ones.

Finally, this issue would not be possible, and the next issue will not be possible, without the attention and feedback of you, our audience. Thank you.

We hope you're reading,  
The editors of Panel





06	Matthew Daintrey-Hall City of Smiles
10	Daniel Lamken Poems of My Home
14	Paul Olchváry One Loses in Gambling, Too (translation)
18	Savo Bojovic My Belgrade
22	Duncan Robertson The Magic of Cars
26	Gábor Gyukics Two poems
30	Home is a place you want to escape from, but cannot (Masha Kamenetskaya interviews Zurab Karumidze)
34	András Gerevich Getno
36	Jennifer Deborah Walker The Chronicles from the Baltics

## *Table of Contents*

# City of Smiles

Matthew Daintrey-Hall

Randolf looked at himself in the mirror of the curtained booth. He smoothed back his hair, twitched the corners of his mouth, then let them droop back again.

There were two other 'students' in the surrounding cubicles: András and Zsuzsa. Randolph knew they were listening through the thin material, so he kept his voice low, almost a whisper. He was uncomfortable, but Professor Jenő said that was the idea. Like confession, he'd told the class, but without the guilt. Sadness isn't a sin. Let it out. Say it aloud, every day and you'll know what you're up against.

"What makes me sad," Randolph began, "I am 45 years old. I live alone. My parents are dead. I have only a few friends. Drinking friends. I've never been to where they live. This morning I got a letter from my landlord saying the rent is going up. It was to cover the installation of the elevator. While I waited for the elevator today, I thought I was alone. I let out a noisy fart. I thought I heard someone giggling behind me. It was my neighbour, the pretty one who moved in on the week they installed the elevator. The last woman I dated drowned herself in the Danube. It was only last week. I met her, here, and we went to the café next door. I told her about myself. I told her about the school. I tried my smile out on her. She said she liked it. When we finished, she left me and went straight to Margaret Bridge. She threw herself off. This is what makes me sad."

Randolf drew out five strips of adhesive tape and stuck them to the side of the mirror. He looked at the smile that had been assigned to him for today's event. The Roosevelt. A beamer. Randolph picked it up and tucked it into his jacket pocket. From the box in his lap, he took out a different smile, the one he had chosen. He attached the tape to the edges of the placard and then pressed it onto his face, smoothing the adhesive strips back, fixing the cardboard grin in place. He let his hands drop to his lap, leaving the smile stuck over his mouth. He stared at it, waiting for the card edges to fade, for the painted lips to become his. He waited for the smile to seep upwards, into his eyes.

The Starlet would be here soon and he knew the face he had to pull.

The Starlet couldn't adjust to the temperature of Budapest, and she updated Meredith on her discomfort regularly. Someone had warned the Starlet of Siberian temperatures, so she'd insisted on wearing ankle-length black tights today, even in her hotel room. Then once they had set off in the car, she'd announced it was too hot, and she couldn't breathe. Meredith had told the driver to stop. They had all clambered out and the Starlet had decided they would walk.

Meredith gritted her teeth and plodded in the Starlet's wake. This wasn't the 'assistant' role she'd expected. She was supposed to be the Producer's girl, helping to wrangle the shoot. Her family had moved to America just as the Great War began, and she still spoke Hungarian at home, so she was vital for communication with the local crew they'd hired. This was supposed to be her first step towards her making pictures of her own.

Now most of her time was spent baby-sitting the Starlet and the Idol. It had started as soon as the Loretta Young story broke. Dashing Idol cheats on Starlet with younger actress. Whispers of a pregnancy... suicide attempts. That had been a week before they flew here. From then on, it became Meredith's job to keep them apart when there were no cameras, and together in the same shot when there were. Yes, she was the epicentre of a celebrity-gossip-tornado, but no matter how starry or idolised the Starlet and Idol were, it left Meredith cold. Just act, for god's sake, make the movie. She supposed it was all experience, useful for when she had to deal with these kinds of egos in her later career.

The woman the press had dubbed the 'Smiling Siren' strode down the Grand Boulevard, clearly in her element. Her entourage, including Meredith, scurried after her. The Daimler cruised alongside. Locals stepped, wide-eyed, from her path.



Illustration by Ariella Pinter

The School of Smiles had more mirrors than anywhere Randolph had ever been, even the plushiest of kávéház. He could never fully escape his nor anyone else's reflection. He paused to look in one at the top of the staircase.

He could hear Jenő downstairs, yelling at an underling. "What did I say? What did I fucking say? Not the Loretta Young! What do you think she'll do if she sees that there?" He was standing by a display case with the whole range of the school's smiles inside. The Starlet was to choose one as a memento of her visit. Obviously, a placard bearing the cheeky grin of the woman who had stolen her husband was not a good idea.

Randolf had also been very particular about the smile he had chosen. He realised that he was to meet the 'Smiling Siren' in the flesh, a genuine Hollywood star, and that most of his face was going to be covered. She would not know who he was. She might recognise the Roosevelt, but that's all he'd be, the echo of a president.

Randolf had a better idea. He checked the Idol's smile in the mirror above the stairs and went down to join the rest of the students.

Luigi had painted the Loretta Young and the Roosevelt. He'd painted the Dick Powell (no-one knew who that was) and the Mona Lisa (the

most difficult). Every one of them had been from a photograph. Even the Mona Lisa was from a black and white postcard Jenő had given him. They were pinned to the wall of his studio. Luigi gave a grim chuckle. His 'studio' was a cupboard area in his family's small apartment.

The Loretta and the Idol were his favourites. Their photos were the glossiest, it seemed to him: properly posed portraits, with each star turning on their full beam. Their eyes blazed, their smiles were sly, flirtatious. The affair, the exquisite sense of scandal that surrounded them, made those lips even more resonant. Both stars had a slight smirk, as if - even though they were in two separate photographs - they were sharing the same torrid memory. When Luigi thought of the work he'd done capturing these smiles, he beamed with pride.

A loud bell made him jump, turn, then leap out the path of a tram. Do not die today. Not today.

Today the Starlet was coming to sit for him. Not a photo clipped from a fan magazine, not even one of the glossier prints his friend at the radio station had given him. Not a postcard of a painting. A genuine screen goddess, 'the Smiling Siren' herself, would sit before him. The photos of her husband and his mistress would fade like they'd been left in the sun. Her real lips (blood red against pale skin, like in the rare colour picture of her he'd procured), would be there for him, right there, to capture, again and again. With his brushes and pens, he would ensnare her.

The star of this movie, thought the Producer, was going to be the city. He really liked it here. The Producer judged a city by its hotels, and a hotel by its kitchen. He was staying at the Astoria, and the Astoria had a superb kitchen. Eleven vast gas ranges, four salamanders, two broilers and three ventilated ovens. There were a dozen New York hotels, many of whom still used coal ovens, who could learn from the Budapest Astoria's kitchen.

And boy, was it cheap here. He'd decided he would stay for a month or so after the production wound up. Get some rooms with his own kitchen, try to live like a local for a bit. Learn some of this crazy-ass language.

Another boon: the city was a real long way from



LA. It would be good for the Idol and Starlet to leave behind their distractions.

Not that the Loretta Young scandal had been bad for any of them. The Idol got to be the cad he usually played on screen. The Starlet got to show another side of herself: that she could cry as well as laugh, be vulnerable as well as brassy. It revived some flagging public interest in both their careers. And it was great promotion for the movie they were here to shoot. They could forget the affair, forget the scandal, escape the rumour mill. Look at each other. Really see each other, in the flesh, not just on a screen or in a performance. The Producer chuckled; he'd probably saved their marriage.

But the real star, here, thought the Producer, wouldn't be a tempestuous actor. It would be the verandas and statues, the domes and courtyards. The vistas, those stirring views across the Danube. He'd told the director to shoot as much on location as they could; they could dub the dialogue and Foley later. What the Producer loved was the sense of spaciousness, of liberating expanse. Yet every corner or window box or door frame crammed with detail. It would give the actors room to breathe and perform, to fall in love again, that reconnection captured on celluloid.

Oh yeah, the movie was going to be just great. A city on the brink of East and West, history dripping off every roof and balcony; the two biggest stars in the world; a story to make your blood surge and your heart roar. In his head he was already writing the blurb.

This stunt today was going to be great, too. The local press were assembling at the school. The photographer from the studio was snapping away with a small camera as they walked down the street. Locals stepped out the way, staring at the Starlet, mouths agape as she swanned past. Glamour glitters on the grim streets. The headlines wrote themselves. She was on her way to sit for a 'smile portraitist'. She was going to be immortalised.

A School of Smiles. He'd been warned by Meredith, Hungarian herself, that the people in this part of the world were grim-faced. But hey, the Producer thought, that was okay. People should be allowed whatever face they wanted, whatever expression they naturally wore. Let their faces say what they really feel. His whole

career was based around artificial swoons and laughter - in real life, just let people feel sad. This place was crazy, though: people trained to smile! He'd thought it was a hoax, like the whole 'Gloomy Sunday' thing. The 'City of Suicides' transformed into the 'City of Smiles', is what the ad in the paper said. The Producer liked that. It suited the Starlet's recent journey from sorrow to joy, from betrayal in love, to a smile reborn.

The Producer had met with Jenő, the school's founder, a few days before. "What's your procedure, then, Professor?" He was sure Jenő wasn't really a professor. "Where do you begin?"

Jenő said the first step for his 'sorrowful souls' was acclimatisation. They had to get used to seeing their face with a smile on it. So they used painted placards. They stuck painted smiles to their faces to simulate a joyous expression. So, the 'Smiling Siren' would have her own famous smile captured, loaned out; it would spread to the real lips and faces of these poor, grim-faced people. 'The Smiling Siren Redeemed'. This was like charity work. And the publicity for the movie, for his stars, was going to be huge. Oh yeah. He liked this city.

The Starlet was ushered into the reception.

Jenő swept his arm across the room, reading from the sign above the desk. "He had the face of joy. His smile said he knew that there is no pain that cannot be overcome by energy or conscience." He beamed and took the Starlet's hand, kissed it and beamed more. "The French poet, Monsieur Albert Camus, on the smile of your own President Roosevelt." For a moment, Randolph thought Jenő was actually going to curtsie.

"And it is Mr Roosevelt's smile which forms a major part in the work of our student, Randolph, here."

Randolf really did smirk beneath his mask. Jenő hadn't noticed the swap.

The Starlet began to shake hands and nod at each student. Here she was, so near, if he stretched he could touch her.

Randolf was ready for his performance. He had studied the scene many times, the expressions on both stars' faces. It was from Caboodle, only their second movie together. The Idol and the Starlet play a married couple. He thinks she is



having an affair, follows her, but discovers he is mistaken. The Starlet comes home, and as she opens the door there is a close-up of the Idol's face. All the famed charm and insouciance suddenly drop away, and there is love, genuine love for the woman who has walked through the door. Darling, I'm so glad you're home.

The Starlet once said in an interview that it was her favourite scene. Randolph had a still of that moment from a fan magazine. He gave it to Luigi. Paint the Idol's smile for the School. Then Randolph could wear the smile he knew the Starlet loved.

Randolf had trained, wearing the Idol's smile. He knew how to angle his face, what to do with his eyes and forehead. The Starlet stepped in front of him, prepared for the standard handshake, and stopped. She stared at him. She reached up to his face, touched the cardboard rectangle.

Her own smile blossomed across her lips, instinctively reciprocating. So glad you're home.

Luigi spends all afternoon with her and paints her smile seventeen times. Every ten minutes, she has to stop and have the muscles in her cheeks massaged. Then she drinks some coffee - later red wine - and returns to her pose. Professional.

After, she, Jenő, and Luigi stand around the seventeen placards. "These three," she says. She looks at Luigi, stares right at him for what seems forever, but she doesn't smile at all once the sitting is over.

The Starlet had been dead a week. The Producer had compressed his mourning into a single afternoon. Then he began constructing the enigma of her demise, the rumours: had the 'City

of Suicides' claimed another young life? Had it been booze? Drugs? Had it been a Hungarian hood who'd whacked her out of insane jealousy? Meredith knew better. Within three days, the Producer was screen-testing the local extras for a body double, and it was obvious to all of them it should be her. Meredith knew the script better than anyone, knew the Starlet, too. The angle of her hip, the way she raised a glass or cigarette. Most of the shots would be wide, or from the rear it was the posture they needed.

The Idol, grieving, had flown back from LA when he heard the news. Meredith was to have nine scenes with him, the camera behind her, her pretending to be the Starlet. Most of the lines were his. Hers were being recorded separately by a voice actor. There wouldn't be any close-ups, but she'd get a credit.

The Producer shrugged. "It's standard procedure for when a star walks. Or croaks. Don't think about it too much. It's what she would have wanted. Her final film, we can't leave it unfinished, right?"

Tomorrow was to be Meredith's first scene. When they'd finished blocking with another double standing in for the Idol, she'd ask the cab to stop off at the school. Jenő and Luigi had welcomed her with solemn embraces, then given her a box.

She opened the box and took out a smile. The lips of the Starlet, painted on a card rectangle. The smile was lustrous, blood red, glossy.

Meredith laid it face down on her palm, then, dipping her head, pushed it against her mouth.

Staring at herself in the mirror, she let the card edges melt away. The Starlet began to seep out, beyond the lips, radiating from the smile. Meredith watched. Her own lips copied it, underneath. The smile spread to her eyes. She dropped the placard back in the box.

---

### *Bio note:* Matthew Daintrey-Hall



Matthew Daintrey-Hall is a film education consultant, living and writing in Budapest. He hosts storytelling events and creative writing workshops, and regularly lectures at the British Film Institute.

## *When The Levee Breaks*

Daniel Lamken

Not if or your or their or any myth  
expecting youth to figure out the sluice,  
toe the line, or finger, as the case may be,

we're in it for eternity: banking what  
we can against the thrusts of nature,  
swimming lessons in Lake Pontchartrain,

or Bonham's vodka glass, informing  
everything. We have a dike to safeguard  
our old town—I walk it with my dog—

and if it ever breaks, folks will flood  
to upper ground (maybe to our home),  
litmussing some welcome or beat down,

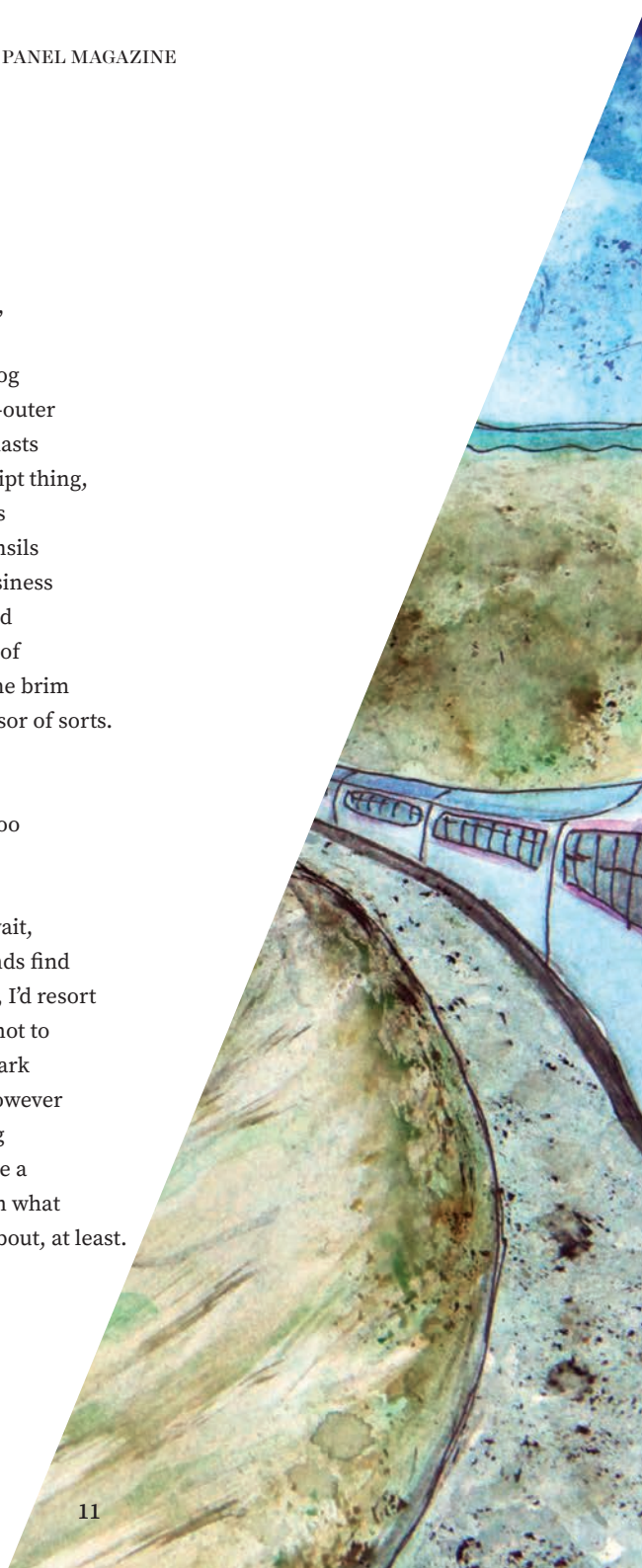
'cause that's what levees have in mind:  
channel danger to another land, whether  
storms are known as natural or contrived.

*Illustration by Maria Gyarmati*

## *The Tinkerer*

I'm thinking of late what it  
would take to visit the tinkerer,  
a guy down the block who  
tangentially sees me and my dog  
as he talks with a huge hanger-outer  
and ratchets some bolt, sandblasts  
a plug, solders some nondescript thing,  
hearing the tin-sounding songs  
from a transistor lost in the tonsils  
of his tiny garage, open for business  
it seems. I've smiled a hello and  
received just a blink at the top of  
his wire-rims, slightly below the brim  
of a hat that spells ELF, a sponsor of sorts.

I'll bring in our toaster, its  
lever a mess or the coils heat too  
fast or—you tell me, after  
all, the years you have triaged  
something simple as this; I'd wait,  
strike up some banter his friends find  
so smooth, and finding it hard, I'd resort  
to the dog to remind him he's not to  
butt in or bark his advice or mark  
this domain as a new claim, however  
the visit might go. I'm guessing  
some toast would result, maybe a  
joke about why folks give up on what  
ought to be fixed or tinkered about, at least.





## *Apologizing for a Family Tree*

She came from nowhere—just across the street,  
where Em and I were sweeping up the leaves  
and walnut mash that tried to cling to passing wheels,  
a slo-mo farrago inching from the parent tree.

„Omlouvám,“ she smiled and frowned, “I’m sorry  
for—” the season or the cleanup day, the panoply  
of pretty, wrinkled leaves still stemming locally  
from her side of the street; we waved ‘don’t worry’

and waited as she ran the corner to catch her bus.  
“And that betrays a conscience for the rest of us.”  
My daughter wasn’t listening—a spider, likely lost,  
was sprinting from our pile, freshly tempest-tossed,

and just as likely bound to be another traffic smear.  
Em took a leaf and shoveled up the miniature deer  
to place her at the base of some recovery. Fear  
will figure out a way back up—if assistance is sincere.

And if not, omlouvám; for what can prep us for a fall?  
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in ways affect us all;  
the spider can’t be Christian (a net that saves the small),  
and neighbors shy away from saying secret stuff withal.

She gathered soul in scarf-fuls, regardless of the chore.  
Matthew chapter twenty-six might challenge us more,  
but in the end we’re pawns of neighborhood spore:  
our roots being what they are, antennae still explore.

Illustration by Maria Gyarmati

## *To the Least of These*

As if to punctuate the advent of the snow,  
migrant ravens perch and pick apart the  
remnant walnuts clinging in the breeze,

pelting down like hailstones—lo, a couple  
months ago the drunks that wander up  
and down our streets would gather these,

grinding nature into nutmeg and maybe  
into eggnog, preparing as these ravens for  
anything to antidote against the freeze,

mild as it's become in schemes of global  
things. The neighborhood seems numb to  
entertain who'd reconnoiter walnut trees,

but coming home I could not abnegate the  
clue of ravens clattering above me, carving  
nutshells of survival with existential ease.

---

*Bio note:* Daniel Lamken



Previously from the Upper Midwest, Dan launched his overseas experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in Turkmenistan. Currently Daniel Lamken lives in Roztoky, Czechia, with his wife Katerina, three children and a flat-coat retriever. He teaches literature at the International School of Prague and facilitates workshops in that subject for the International Baccalaureate Organization. He also runs the Creative Writers' Group at Globe Bookstore in Prague's centrum.

# *One Loses at Gambling, Too*

An excerpt from the memoir book "My First Two Hundred Years" by Pál Királyhegyi  
Translation – Paul Olchváry

**A**t gambling you can lose, too. Homesickness is strong even without a home. No distance is too great, it's just a question of money.

Though Detroit was foreign to us, we each found work all the same, on the day of our arrival no less. Not that Karcsi actually had a relative there or, rather, there used to be one but he had moved to Cincinnati, which is the American city with the loveliest name, not as though that did us much good at the moment.

Once again I became a busboy, now with real experience, while Karcsi got a job as a host at a classy restaurant, where he used two fingers to point guests to the tables they should sit at. In English the term for this position was in fact "captain," though they do not belong to the army. Karcsi was tall, handsome, and elegant, and indeed the boss even commented that he'd been born for the job. We didn't dispute it. Between the two of us we earned forty dollars a week, which was a pretty penny back then. Naturally food was on the house.

I tried hard to keep my job, while Karcsi kept his with no effort at all. But neither one of us cared about the joy of work. We didn't care about anything. By then a terrible affliction had planted its seed and taken root in us, unnoticed an affliction called homesickness. Not exactly for a home, since the home, under Hungary's head of state at the time, Miklós Horthy, was not the sort it was possible to yearn for. It even occurred to me that perhaps I would be arrested were I to go

home, because back in New Brunswick I'd undertaken sharp attacks against Horthy and his regime, and I knew that every issue of that paper was available in Budapest, at the National Széchényi Library. But I couldn't even care about this any more.

We wanted to be in Budapest again, no matter what it took. Maybe it's not even homesickness, this feeling that besets you. It ambushed us after we'd read a Budapest newspaper. We wanted to see Rákóczi Boulevard and other places once again: Hársfa Street, where I'd been born, and the bench I'd carved into back in school. Maybe it's not even homesickness, but that you merely want to meet and shake hands with your bygone self. We were suffering. We wanted to get home! To kiss my father's hand for just two weeks, to be humbly obedient to him, which I'd never managed to do in my real childhood. This sort of thing needs to be made up for. I felt I must see those who'd stayed behind the trees, the buildings, the people.

It seems I can't bear this America, I thought. It is a country for people stronger, smarter, more talented than me.

Karcsi and I talked about this nonstop after work, and sometimes we went out to the train station, aimlessly so, only to look at the departing trains.

We needed a thousand dollars. That would be enough for both of us to go home and live well on, and return. It wasn't an unattainable sum. In three or four years we could scrape it together. With iron will. With iron nerves.



Photo by Jennifer Deborah Walker



Around 3 AM, when Karcsi would come home, I was usually long asleep. This particular morning Karcsi woke me up.

“How much money do you have?”

“Three dollars.”

“I have seven.”

I sat up in bed. Karcsi looked nervous and deathly pale.

“What’s wrong, my dear Karcsi?”

“Nothing. Those damn waiters are driving me crazy.”

“All day long they tell stories about that gambling den they go to religiously after work. It’s open day and night. Some of them win, some of them lose. Last night, Jack, one of the waiters, won two thousand dollars. That’s what everyone was talking about. He did it in a half-hour. He began with thirty dollars. At the moment we have ten dollars between us, and it doesn’t matter at all if we hang onto it or squander it. Let’s go. We can be there in a couple of minutes, and if we’re in luck we can go home to Budapest.”

I dressed in a matter of moments, and

off we went without a word. I don’t know why they call such places ‘dens’. We went in. We had to go through lots of little doors until finally we reached a room where a man of around forty, with a rough exterior, stood in front of a footstool. He had us stand up on this footstool and then deftly rifled through our pockets in the blink of an eye. He even lifted our hats, looking for weapons. We had none. Next we clambered up a decaying staircase. Dim lights filtered through the walls as unseen individuals followed our every move from behind tiny peepholes. Finally, as if by an incantation, a little iron door opened before us. The door closed by itself, and we were inside the gaming room.

It was an enormous space with lots of tables that looked rather like billiard tables, covered as they were by green baize, except that they were much larger than needed for billiards and there was no sign of any cues. Someone was throwing dice at every table, each one of which was surrounded by a thick crowd. There was no sitting down.

Four men sitting on tall ladders were watching over the games.

A great deal of money was lying

about on the tables, along with stacks of silver dollars. There were no chips. The players were talking in specialized jargon that might as well have been Chinese. We didn't understand a word. "We've got seven and eleven." "Hard four." "Come home to daddy." We heard magic words such as these.

I went over to one of the tables and observed the others.

The tables bore numbers and squares, and it was on them that the money was placed. I put our ten dollars on a number near us. If we blow it, may it happen fast. The dealer asked me something I didn't understand, so I just gave an airy nod. A bit of time passed, but no one raked money toward us. Well, it seems we've lost our ten dollars. No problem.

The other players around me were much more interesting than the game itself. Instead of winning I was watching them.

Elegant, silver-haired gentlemen looked on, trembling, as their last five-dollar bills swam away. Stalwart, ragged, pale men in tattered shoes lost without batting an eyelid only to pull thousands more from their pockets. Faces were red, hands were trembling, and the air was thick from cigarette smoke and sweat. There wasn't much talking. Everyone stared fixedly at the rolling of the dice, as if gone mad. Only the croupier, with his rake, was bored of it all. The whole scene reminded me of the jail.

Wait, what was going on? It was as if Karcsi had gasped behind me. I turned, and saw his face twist up, his eyes bulge, and sweat pour down in streams from under his hat, only without him noticing. He just kept staring at the table, then groaned, hoarsely:

"Take it out."

Following Karcsi's gaze, I saw a vast amount of money on the table. I understood what he was getting at. Slowly, conspicuously, so everyone would see if I were making a mistake, I reached toward the money. I was prepared for the croupier to strike my hand, but he didn't even bat an eye. By now I had the money. It sank in that our money had multiplied so smartly and nicely because I'd let it sit. I didn't dare count the winnings, but simply looking at it was enough to tell me it must be a nice tidy sum, since a good number of twenties and tens were crawling among all those greenbacks.

I immediately put more money on the winning number. I lost it. Now I put twice as much down. I won. Then I lost. What was this? Again I won. Now I threw down a hundred-dollar bill there, were it was supposed to go, because I'd won. And then, after a good many more rounds, I heard Karcsi's voice from behind me:

"Have you gone mad? Stop it right now!"

"Yes, I've gone mad," I said, and immediately threw two hundred dollars somewhere.

I won. Karcsi then dragged me away from the table, and we left. The magic door closed behind us. In the cold air out on the street I began coming to my senses. We counted our cash. Nine-hundred and ninety-seven dollars and zero cents. Now this was Europe. Budapest. Hársfa Street. Rákóczi Boulevard and whatever we wished. Akácfa Street too.

No, I wouldn't send a telegram. I wouldn't even write. My mother would open the door and would collapse into my arms. "Why, you've come back, my son?"

Life is so beautiful!

We danced on the street, in the Detroit cold, hugging each other and

hollering with joy. We waved the cash, we smelled it. So it was true, after all: money doesn't have a smell. What an invention! And the police don't let you gamble. Nonsense.

Close to the building we lived in we saw two men coming toward us. Karcsi was aglow.

"Hey, maybe we know them. I'll die if I can't tell someone what happened to us."

The two men came closer. They stopped in front of us. All at once the barrel of a revolver was pointed between my eyes, and I heard the quick command: "Stick 'em up, boys."

I raised my hands. Slowly. Let him shoot if he wants. In a well-practiced

movement one of the robbers reached into my pocket, precisely the one containing Budapest, and shoveled it out in one fell swoop. All of it.

We went home without the money. Karcsi flung himself on his bed and wept. For me, it had yet to sink in. We've been robbed, I kept saying to myself so I'd understand.

Dawn was breaking. It was time to rise and get to work. There was no reason to cry; we weren't wild animals. A police complaint? Hopeless. They'd never find them, anyway. I didn't even know what the robbers looked like. I didn't remember their faces. Only that the ears behind the revolver were surprisingly large. Not that it matters. After all, if I think about it, we really lost only ten dollars.

*Bio note:* Pál Királyhegyi



Pál Királyhegyi (1900–1981) - a Hungarian writer, journalist, humorist, TV personality, and screenwriter. He is the author of several novels and books of nonfiction. He lived in the USA and in England but always kept coming back to Hungary. During one of his returns, in 1944, he was sent to the concentration camp, where he nearly perished. His Holocaust memoir *Not Everyone Has Died* was a great success, and will be published in English later in 2018.

As a writer and an intellectual who had lived abroad, he found it increasingly difficult to find work after Hungary became a communist state, and in 1951 he was sent to the countryside for a time in internal exile.

*Bio note:* Paul Olchváry



Paul Olchváry has translated many books of Hungarian prose literature to English for leading presses, including György Dragomán's novel *The White King*. He has received translation grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and PEN American Center in the United States. Paul is the founder and publisher of New Europe Books.



# *My Belgrade*

Savo Bojovic

The first time we met,  
you were grey and rectangular,  
I had a backpack  
and shoes that would light up  
with every step I'd take  
towards the school or the gym,  
where I'd play basketball  
just like those guys you'd welcome  
at your main square  
every late summer at the time,  
and then we got to know each other better  
when I started going to the cinema,  
boy did you have many of those, remember?  
well one night after seeing a film  
I went to the park across the street  
and had my first kiss right there,  
the president, the mayor, and the parliament  
all triangulating the tree  
that gave snowflakes a rest  
as I touched that girl's lips  
and everything turned slippery,  
I thought the universe would lose its balance,  
but it didn't,  
it just pulled on the rope of our friendship,  
mine and yours,  
a velvet noose that told me  
I'd never forget you

Illustration by Lyudmila Martynova



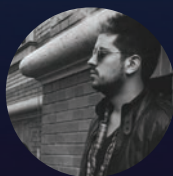
no matter how much I wanted to,  
which is what happened  
when the school got bigger and the world too,  
and I wanted them to go together  
so I left you for the first time  
when you felt as small as most of the people  
you pretended to take care of,  
you beautiful traitor,  
I loved you so much  
from so far away  
that it seemed like the color

was back in your cheeks every time  
I'd see you for a short while,  
and you talked me into coming back,  
somehow you did,  
and you became a home again  
with a special space in your concrete heart  
made for me only,  
and years would go by,  
I watched you disintegrate like never before,  
I watched you welcome the mediocrities  
like they built you,  
I watched you become a home  
for those who never needed more than a roof  
over their heads,  
And saw the pink in your cheeks was  
from being slapped around, after all,  
and I kept thinking you knew  
you were better than that, but no,  
you kept getting drunk on piss  
and the faces and the coats  
and the purses and the smartphones  
and the headphones and the billboards  
and the reality shows  
and the fake tits and the fake lips  
and the fake words and the fake lights  
and the darkness you needed  
but never dove into,  
you chased me off again,  
you told me to go fuck myself

with everything you threw at me,  
 every once in a while giving me a taste  
 of what I could dine on  
 for the rest of my life  
 if you weren't so quick to feed me the shit  
 that's gotten into  
 your every corner and artery  
 and traffic light and gum stained sidewalk  
 and transvestite bus station hooker  
 and the great mind destroyed with cheap drugs,  
 even the refugees want to leave you now, brother,  
 and I will listen to you and I'll go,  
 I'll get the fuck out of here while I can,  
 25 years, a quarter of a century of lives, laughs and  
 tears  
 between what you were and what you are,  
 your glass ceiling is a mirror and I'm breaking it,  
 I know the victory is mine only if I come back,  
 and that's why I will,  
 because you never taught me how to win  
 but you did teach me how to fight.

---

*Bio note:* Savo Bojovic



Savo Bojovic was born in Belgrade, and has lived in Serbia, the Netherlands, United Kingdom. He majored in Business and major. After four years of inhabiting the skin of a corporate sell-out, Savo moved to Budapest. Officially - as a post-graduate student of film theory; unofficially - to work on his first novel. Savo also writes poetry, despite trying not to.



# *The Magic of Cars*

Duncan Robertson

I have tried, before, to write about the magic of cars.

If you have just boarded an airplane with all your possessions and regurgitated them into a breadbox apartment in an urban center on the other side of the world, one thing that you are unlikely to have packed is your car. Depending on the caliber of public transportation, you may also be unlikely to ride in a private vehicle for some time.

The whole experience of the car changes in its absence, and upon reentry into the car environment a city changes too. It's alleys unkink and its streets unravel. The articulate speed of the car reveals and makes available the outer strata: population centers of second and third tier significance, forests and mountains, lakes and beaches and difficult to reach attractions set outside the city center, all of which would normally require the close reading of an arcane train schedule. After some time apart from the car, you may find yourself marveling at its upholstery and power windows.

It travels at middle speed, between a pedestrian crawl and cruising altitude. Its closest relatives are the train or the bicycle, yet neither are very much like the car. It demands the trappings of a middle life. You need a substantial income for the

payment of insurance, for gas and regular maintenance. You must collect the relevant paperwork from government offices, in order to take a driver's test in a foreign language. You must apply your signature to many forms you cannot understand.

I am discussing the car, or the change in the experience of the car, because it follows a pattern familiar to any long-term traveler. First, it disappears under diverse new methods of conveyance (metro systems, tuk-tuks, shuddering trams), then, gradually, it is glimpsed through taxi rides or in afternoons spent borrowing a friend's van to move apartments. Finally, it is resurrected via airport shuttle, so, the last time you navigate the streets of a foreign city where you have lived for months or years, they shoot by at pace, filmic, replaced by terrain along the highway. Often, this final leg is accompanied by music in headphones, setting the tone for a departure fugue which lasts all the way to cruising altitude, only dispelled once it comes time to decide whether to purchase an expensive sandwich of mediocre quality or to wait and grab something in Frankfurt.

The car, inseparable from life in many parts of the world, is first discarded, then grows exotic, finally revealing itself through an altered



Illustration by Olga Lo

lens. The experience of the car, like the experience of living abroad, ends in a return, although it is seldom the return we expect. This is because, in a new country, one is as foreign to the car as one is a foreigner in the larger sense. Cars follow the pattern of foreignness of everything about home which is taken for granted, lost, and rediscovered.

The absence of friends and family is less often experienced in stabs of homesickness, and more commonly experienced for what it is, an absence. During a holiday this might be felt so acutely as to become explicit, but usually presents as a background hum, a whine, which at the outset of any serious intercontinental relocation is undetectable; to be

somewhere else was the point, after all. Then, slowly, as you pass families on the sidewalk or watch children leaving school, all those things which are homey accumulate a distant, glossy quality. The hum pitches up slightly, detectable in a moment of dissonance. Weren't you once a child in a school nothing like this one? Wasn't there a time when it was possible to communicate with shopkeepers? In one place there are rules that govern the volume of conversation on the subway. In another place, you must never call an occupied seat 'not free,' only 'taken'. In a third place, a young person offering to split a restaurant bill with an older person is a matter of grave concern, signaling a strain



Illustration by Olga Lo

of impudence so repugnant as to call into question the entire purpose of having enjoyed a meal together in the first place. These rules are not fleshed out systematically, but piecemeal, sometimes second hand, against one's own preconceived notions of what is normal and with the help of people working against their own language barriers. There are misunderstandings and false starts. There are flabbergasting indiscretions, self-consciousness of an order that approaches radioactivity. If you are ethnically or culturally aberrant, there is the feeling of being watched. Then, one day, an inscrutable

shopkeeper collars you as you are walking by his place of business. People are packed into his corner store at the end of a street where he peddles candy cigarettes and newspapers and espresso from a coffee machine. They are passing around pictures of a baby, not a phone with baby pictures on it, but glossy prints. While you have been hunched over your soup, people have died and been born and fallen in love and overeaten at lunch and nodded off at work in call centers. You nurse the champagne in your white plastic coffee cup and unselfconsciously adore the picture of this newborn baby, the picture of a stranger's baby, as it circles the group in the corner

store. You are receiving the pictures, and they are no longer baby pictures; they are baby pictures again and for the first time. Have you become sentimental? The opposite. You have been cordoned off. This is the first crack in the veneer of strangeness, through which you now spy regular life, thrumming along unperturbed by the imagined slights and dangers of an alien country - totally mundane in its own reckoning - and it comes as a tremendous relief. How silly you have been, how paranoid and sensitive. No two places yet exist that in only one, children are born.

You will never count change closely again, in this store. You will never be as embarrassed about how poorly you speak the language, in this store. You will be more patient and more polite and more awake.

But, like learning a language long enough to realize that people everywhere are talking about the same things, the significance of this will fade. The feeling of seeing clearly will tarnish.

You may even realize, one day, that you are bored, unable to recall what was important about handling baby

pictures or riding in a car. You will return home, unsure of what drove you abroad in the first place, or, if you are still possessed of the energy and presence of mind, you will move and begin the process again: each iteration more or less transformative, more or less isolated, more or less revelatory.

So what have you learned? That there is divinity in these mundane things, these car rides and first verb conjugations and glossy prints? Not more so than there is mundanity in the divine. Perhaps, only to treat the old adages with a grain of salt. Home is not always where your heart is, sometimes it is nowhere at all. Maybe you can't go home again, but you might discover it one afternoon while out for a walk.

Or that, for those that keep an even keel, persevere and give others the benefit of the doubt, there exists the possibility of an organizing experience, an impermanent powerful crystallizing story of return, which, in its upholstery and power windows, its great modal velocity, does not follow the linear geometry of departure and arrival, but etches a circle onto the surface of a sphere.

---

*Bio note:* Duncan Robertson



Duncan Robertson was born and raised in Seattle, WA. He has lived and worked in Portland, OR; Suwon, in South Korea, and Prague. He now resides in Budapest, where he is nearing the completion of a new novel, *Visegrad*. He writes, here, in his capacity as an armchair dromologist of some reknown.



## *mirage*

Gabor Gyukics

leaning away from the lectern  
she watches  
still she can't see  
what is before her  
her mother buried  
the navel cord next to  
the only tree in the courtyard  
to keep her daughter at bay  
on her weather and sun beaten skin  
the wind takes a break  
in the empty  
mile wide space  
in the raw air  
blameless fog-clouds enshroud  
her skyscraper solitude  
in the cave deep silence  
his may-fly long life  
disperses in the mist  
if she could  
she would scatter sand to the  
  
eyes of the thousand tongued wind  
she stays alive  
as long as she  
laughs  
amidst the crowd



Photo by Eszter Fruzsina

## *mirázs*

a pulpitusról elhajolva  
nézi  
mégsem érzékeli  
az előtte láthatót

szülőanyja a belső udvar  
egyetlen fája mellé  
temette el a köldökszínort  
hogy fiát a szülőföldhöz kösse

idő- és napátjárta bőrén  
megül a szél  
az üres  
kilométernyi térben

a nyers levegőben  
vétlen  
ködfelhők borulnak  
toronyházmagányára

a barlangi csendben  
kérészélete  
vakon foszlik semmivé

ha kéznél lenne  
homokot szórna az ezernyi hangon  
megszólaló szél szemébe

addig marad életben  
amíg nevet



*umbrella moon*

you see your double on the water's  
surface  
you lean closer  
your body jostles itself inside the pores  
of your face  
the angle is narrowed down by your  
glances

the wind won't dry your skin  
in the deepening riverbed

you're thinking about  
a pleasant place  
you've seen long ago  
calming yourself  
to get in harmony  
with the environment

no need purchasing  
a second hand souvenir  
from the thug hanging out  
in front of the pawnshop  
tonight

there are things  
that can do you in -  
a body  
with a ripped up abdomen  
sinks faster  
then the past cajoling  
present



Photo by Eszter Fruzsina



## *holdernyő*

megkettőz a víztükör  
közelebb hajolsz  
arcod pórusaiba zsúfolódik a tested  
minden pillantásod szűkíti a látószöveget

nem szárítja meg bőröd a szél  
a mélyülő folyómederben

egy rég látott  
kellemes helyre gondolsz  
hogymegnyugodj  
és  
harmoníába kerülj  
a környezettel

ezúttal nem szükséges  
kéz alatt emléket vened  
a zálogház előtt dekkolótól

vannak dolgok  
melyek elbírnak veled  
a felvágott hasú hullá  
gyorsabban merül  
a múltat idéző  
jelennél

---

### *Bio note:* Gábor Gyukics



Gabor Gyukics is a Budapest-born Hungarian-American poet and a literary translator. The author of seven books of poetry and eleven books of translations (including *A Transparent Lion*, selected poetry of Attila József, an anthology of North American Indigenous poets in Hungarian and *Swimming in the Ground: Contemporary Hungarian Poetry* (in English, both with co-translator Michael Castro)), Gábor Gyukics writes both in English and Hungarian. His latest book titled “*A Hermit Has No Plural*” was published by Singing Bone Press in 2015.





Photo by Masha Kamenetskaya

## *“Home is a place you want to escape from, but cannot”*

Writing in a language that is not your native one can be both challenging and rewarding. On the one hand, a writer may feel tied up with vocabulary and grammar constructions that don't naturally belong to him. On the other hand, if a writer succeeds – he gets, at the very least, an access to a broader market and to an additional set of tools for craft and storytelling.

The novel “Dagny, or A Love Feast” by Georgian writer Zurab Karumidze is not only a beautiful imaginative text, rich in its complex world inhabited with characters, both real and mythological, fictional and non-fictional, passionate and desperate, those who were searching for love and, meanwhile, creating art. “Dagny” also shows an example of a successful novel in English, written by a non-native speaker. Long-listed for the International Dublin Literary Award in 2013, published again in 2014 in the United States, just recently the novel has been selected among top 10 books published in Germany, coming in third place out of ten.

“Panel” editor Masha Kamenetskaya was curious about what was the reason, or the inspirational push, behind Zurab Karumidze decision to write a novel in English.

**– I know that you've got a degree in English Language and Literature, then PhD for researching poetry of John Donne. And you've translated several of your short stories in English. But writing the whole novel must have been a totally different experience. How did the idea to write a novel in English emerge in the first place?**

– The reason was to get broader readership. The Georgian language is spoken by 3-4 million people, out of which 3-4 percent read books. The intention was to “translate” Georgia (in the broadest sense), to make it readable for the English speaking world, which is by far bigger. There were no deliberations, pre-meditations on my part a propos of language; I just sat down to my desk and started writing in English. My wife, seeing that, told me “Are you going mad?” and I said “sort of...”

**– For many people who write in a language that is not their native tongue, the whole writing process becomes much more challenging. For me, for example, maybe the most difficult thing is to "switch" the brain to the "English language mode". How was it with you? Did you find it was particularly difficult, surprising, or inspiring?**

– English is my third language (the second being Russian), and for sure I would have faced lots of lexico-grammatical challenges: pre-post-positions, articles (which come with the mother's milk), some idioms, etc. However, I've been fascinated with this language since my childhood – the literature written in it, the songs sung in it by the rock-musicians of 1960s and 70s, etc. The fascination has been so strong, that I attempted writing a couple of short stories and magazine articles. But a novel in one's third language – that's pushing the envelope...

Paradoxically, however, notwithstanding the linguistic difficulties and challenges, I felt more freedom while writing in English, than I would have felt while writing in my native Georgian. More freedom in terms of narrative, imagery, associations, allusions, overt or covert references. Imagine yourself standing in front of a forbidden territory, a Zone, and suddenly a voice tells you to get inside and do whatever you want. And I did get inside, and touched, tasted, ate, drank nearly everything I could. I had less restrictions from the inner censorship, I was less self-critical; it's like going abroad for fun, leaving your homegrown commitments and obligations behind. That's why “Dagny” is like an “intertextual salad bowl” – carrying such a variety of themes, stories, references.

**– "Dagny, or a Love Feast" was longlisted for the International Dublin Literary Award and gained critical acclaim. Were you personally satisfied with a result? Do you have any plans**

Photo by Levan Kherkheilidze



**to continue writing fiction in English?**

– Being long-listed with such celebrities as Umberto Eco, Haruki Murakami, Michel Houellebecq, Stephen King, David Lodge, was exciting, however awkward. But long-lists are no big deal. I was much happier to find my novel listed 3rd in Germany, among the top-ten books of the month in February 2018. This list is made monthly, for more than 40 years, by 25 leading critics and journalists from Germany (mostly), Austria and Switzerland. That humbled me indeed.

**– Have your short story collections and novels, written in Georgian, been translated to English or other languages?**

– Only the two of my short stories, translated by myself into English (and edited by an American friend of mine), have been published in the USA (Clockwatch Review, Bloomington, IL), back in 1996. “Dagny” is available in Turkish and German, and not in Georgian.

**– When the Georgian publishing house “Siesta” published “Dagny”, did you (or publishers) expect to get an audience from the locals - English-speaking Georgians, or was the target an international audience?**

– Both. But the broad English-speaking audience was eventually reached later, in 2014, when the novel was published by the Dalkey Archive press, which is based in the US, but also covers the UK and Ireland.

**– The characters featured in “Dagny” were based on real figures who may be known to the audience, but not so mainstream as to be known to everyone? It requires a curious mind and some general knowledge from the reader, in my opinion. Do you ever**

**picture your “target reader” while writing, especially while writing fiction?**

– As a matter of fact, I was more concerned with those readers who knew the real figures featured in the novel. To an extent I expanded these figures beyond their known shape, but not too much; I stayed with the Aristotelian definition of Mimesis – depiction of something that happened, or could have happened. Some Georgians may criticize me for “going too far” with Vazha Pshavela – an amazing Georgian poet: a highlander man, who proved to be the first Modernist in our literature... But look at Ken Russell’s movies, how he pictures Liszt, Wagner, Mahler, etc.

A propos of the “target reader” – while writing, I usually have 12 or so people on my mind, whom I know, and whose tastes I “observe”, and this is my virtual audience.

**– Are there other Georgian writers who also make the effort to write in English? Or are there any writers from overseas living in Georgia? And, how diverse are literary circles are in Georgia?**

– The literary scene in Georgia has become rather vibrant, as this year Georgia is going to be the Guest of Honor at the Frankfurt Book Fair. Georgia’s National Book Center has attracted many publishers from Europe (especially Germany) to translate and publish contemporary and classical authors and present them in Frankfurt.

I don’t know any other Georgian writer who would have made an effort of writing in English – at least a published one. There are several Georgians writing in German – like a young lady Nino Haratishvili, who is based in Germany and her novels won acclaim in this country; or Givi Margvelashvili – an old







Photo by Masha Kamenetskaya

timer in German literature. A couple of overseas writers show up from time to time in Georgia and write about the country – a young American author Tara Isabella Burton is one. Wendell Stevenson, and American author, was based in Tbilisi in late 1990s – early 2000s, and she wrote a book on Georgia – “The Stories I Stole”.

**– Are the contemporary bohemian circles of Georgia, somehow, worth being portrayed in fiction?**

– Contemporary bohemians differ from their “ancestors” living in 19th century and fin de siècle. Contemporary Georgian bohemians are clubbers, they don’t drink but they smoke weed, are politically active leftist-anarchists, some of them get jobs in local NGOs, some trying to find their place in arts or writing or music or cinema, some are gay, some straight, but defend gay rights, etc. Are they worth being portrayed in

fiction? Yes, of course!

**– When it comes to immigrant/expat writers, these people usually travel a lot, explore a lot, but cannot usually find an answer to the question of where their home is. And the theme for our first issue is “home”. I know this question may seem a bit tacky but still: how do you, Zurab, define “home”?**

– Writers are homeless, on the other hand – wherever they put their hat is their home. Take Hemingway – a guy from Illinois, who found his homes in a Parisian café, Spanish Corrida, Civil War battlefield, or Cuba. James Joyce epitomizes such homelessness through his life and the paradigm of Ulysses in his major novel.

I would define “Home” in a sort of antinomy way: Home is a place you want to return to, but cannot / Home is a place you want to escape from, but cannot.

## Getno

András Gerevich

A férfiakra már alig emlékszem,  
csak arra, ahogy állok a tükör előtt,  
és próbálok magamnak tetszeni,  
hogy mások is megkívánják  
izmosra gyúrt testemet.  
Szerettem vágyódni, megkívánni  
egy idegent, ráizgulni valakire,  
akinek nem is kellek, rám se néz,  
akivel nem is tudnék mit kezdeni  
a folytonos szexen és baszáson túl,  
mert mindenkinek csak a teste kellett,  
az arcán és a szemében a vágy,  
csak az kellett, hogy engem kíváncson,  
a testemet, így birtokoltam, így hittem  
vagy vágytam, és soha, senki, de senki,  
egyetlen ember sem volt soha az enyém.  
Soha. Csak a vágy maradt,  
magamra már nem is emlékszem.

Illustration by Lili Judit Pamuk

### Bio note: András Gerevich



András Gerevich is a poet, writer, translator, scriptwriter, born in Budapest in 1976. András published four books of poetry in Hungarian. His work has been translated into many languages, including English, French, German, Bulgarian and Slovenian. Gerevich himself has translated English-speaking poets into Hungarian, such as Seamus Heaney, Charles Bernstein, Frank O'Hara and others. András was awarded several international scholarships and residencies, has taught poetry workshops at Vassar College in New York and Eötvös University in Budapest, was a poetry editor for two literary journals: Kalligram in Budapest and Chroma in London.



## *Getno*

translated by Christopher Whyte

The men, well, I hardly remember them,  
just standing in front of the mirror  
doing my best to find myself attractive  
in the hope that others would desire  
my body's knotted muscles.  
What I liked was hankering after,  
getting the hots on for a stranger,  
someone who didn't need me, didn't  
deign me with a glance, someone I wouldn't  
know what to do with once the repeated  
sex, the fucking were over and done  
because all I wanted was their body,  
face and eyes filled with desire,  
all I wanted was them wanting me,  
my body, I possessed them that way, at  
least so I thought or wanted, and not one,  
not a single one was ever mine,  
not one man was mine out of so many.  
Nobody. Only the longing lived on.  
I can remember nothing of myself.

### *Bio note:* Christopher Whyte



Christopher Whyte (born in 1952) is a poet in Scottish Gaelic and a novelist in English, as well as the translator into English of Pasolini, Rilke, Tsvetaeva and the Hungarian poet Ádám Nádasdy. Since 2006 he has had a base in Budapest.

# *Chronicles of the Baltics*

Jennifer Deborah Walker

**H**unted by the ghosts of Communists past, the former Soviet states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are countries that have been reborn with new, shifting identities under the blanket of the European Union. Although Estonia shares more in common linguistically with Finland than its Balto-Slavic neighbors to the south, all three of these three countries share strong cultural and historical links with one another. Their mutual history with Soviet Russia, which grabbed the territories and incorporated the Baltics into the “Motherland”, has influenced the Baltic States in more ways than one. Within contemporary Baltic literature national identity and a sense of home have become prevalent themes. Begin the Baltic literary exploration with these three translated work authors originating from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.



## *Latvia: Flesh-Colored Dominoes, Zigmunds Skujiņš (1999)*

Translated by Kaija Straumanis (2014)

This is one of the few pieces of Latvian literature that has made it into English translation. It's a unique piece of magical realism that presents an alternate history of Latvia. Themes of identity prevail throughout the novel, told through two stories - one set in the 18th century and another around World War II. Even if more than a century separates the family residing in a Latvian town that has survived multiple occupations from the Russians and German, the novel reconciles the two threads into one. In the 18th century, Baroness Valtraute von Brīgen's husband returns: except only half of him. The baron's body had been severed in two and his lower half sewn onto the body of Captain Ulste. He appears in the baroness' life, claiming his lower half belonged once to her husband, one thing leads to another and they conceive a child. However, when her husband eventually returns in one piece, questions arise. During World War II, the narrator is a nameless young boy and his half-Japanese step-brother, Jānis, raised by his grandfather. The novel dances around the theme of identity - especially national identity and whether nationality is determined by blood, especially in the case of Jānis, who is treated as a foreigner for his Asian appearance, yet identifies with being Latvian and also Baltic German at the height of World War II's anti-German sentiment. Zigmunds Skujiņš was one of Latvia's most renowned writers, and this translation gives English speakers the opportunity to delve into his work.





*Estonia: The Cavemen Chronicle, Mihkel Mutt (2012)*

Translated by Adam Cullen (2015)

In a country changing over regimes, Mutt's novel may chronicle a basement bar that lies beneath Tallinn's medieval streets, but it's a story of a country and its shifting identity. Told through a series of vignettes about the residents who call the "Cave" their home, an eclectic mix of intelligentsia, artists, and undercover KGB artists, the Caveman Chronicles weaves the reader through a personal history of Tallinn's creative class and how the shift in regime affects their lives. Some benefit from Estonia's liberation from the Soviets, others suffer having enjoyed the benefits of the regime. The narrator of the story, which is perhaps slightly autobiographical, is a tabloid columnist who is a keen observer of the various personalities that walk in and out of his life and the bohemian circle gathering in the Cave, and tries to save fading artistic figures in the post-communist world by promoting them in paparazzi photos used in gossip columns. A fascinating insight into the world of changing Estonia and its cultural undercurrents.



*Lithuania: Breathing Into Marble, Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė (2008)*

Translated by Marija Marcinkute (2016)

Breathing Into Marble is a high-octane family drama set in rural Lithuania. Isabel, a young woman living with her husband Liudas and epileptic son Gailius, decides to adopt troubled orphan Ilya on impulse. Ilya doesn't complete the family the way Isabel had wished. Instead he begins to unravel a thread that leads to tragedy. Uncomfortable memories of the past and the horrors of the present interplay among wild emotions and haunting imagery where the concept of home is torn to shreds. The novel tackles issues from childhood sexual abuse, suicide, and the problems that can arise from the adoption process in Lithuania. The relationship between Ilya and Isabel is at the heart of this story, a moving and intense walk through a dark and twisted relationship. Breathing Into Marble was one of the first novels to be translated from Lithuanian into English.

---

*Bio note:* Jennifer Deborah Walker



After Jennifer left her sordid past of Nuclear Physics behind, she has since built up a career as a writer and is currently working on a book on Budapest and Vienna for a US publisher. When she is not writing, she is usually reading, particularly international literature, travelling, and getting far too passionate over architectural details.



## **Editors**

Masha Kamenetskaya

Duncan Robertson

Jennifer Deborah Walker

## **Editor at Large**

Matt Henderson Ellis

## **Art director**

Maria Gyarmati

## **Contributors**

Savo Bojovic

Matthew Daintrey-Hall

András Gerevich

Gábor Gyukics

Daniel Lamken

Paul Olchvály

Christopher Whyte

## **Artists**

Eszter Fruzsina

Mátyás Fazekas (“YK”)

Lili Pamuk

Olga Lo

Lyudmila Martynova

Mary Burdina

Ariella Pinter

Illustration by YK

## Artists of Panel

### Maria Gyarmati

interactive media and visual artist. She works in the field of technology, design and art where she reaches innovative and elegant solutions in various types of projects. Born in USSR, she moved to Budapest, Hungary, in 2012. Here she works both as an independent artist&designer and as a web developer for "Ericsson Hungary". She is also a "TechLab" fellow in Moholy-Nagy University of art and design. Maria is a participant of different international exhibitions, shows and festivals.

### Eszter Fruzsina

Self-taught artist and photographer who lives and works in Budapest. Her works have been greatly influenced by music, performance art and poetry.

### “YK”

Wanderer. Wannabe artist. Music lover. Dance fanatic. Pun-ist. Loud storyteller.

The image published in this issue was made in Innsbruck, Austria, at the Paninothek restaurant, where you could eat the most amazing paninis, while a friendly dog from next table is begging you, at every bite you take.

### Lili Judit Pamuk

Born in 1998, she is currently attending her second year at the University of Fine Arts at the Intermedia Department in Budapest. Lili works with painting and photography mainly around the subject of the human body, genders and religions.

### Olga Lo

Born in St.Petersburg, Russia, she currently lives and works in Budapest. Olga is a participant of several group exhibitions and a few solo ones. Beauty of colors, variety of life forms in nature are the main themes of her artworks.

### Lyudmila Martynova

Born in Slavyansk, Ukraine. Studied architecture and graduated from Kharkov State University. Works as an architect, a painter, a set designer for theater productions. Has been living in Budapest

### Ariella Pintér

Born in Győr, Hungary. Studied graphic design at Metropolitan University from 2012-2015. Works as a graphic designer at Ericsson Hungary. Living in Budapest for 6 years now. Also loves playing guitar, painting and creating sculptures.





Illustration by Maria Gyarmati

The next issue of Panel will be out in Autumn 2018.

The call for submissions is open now.

We welcome pieces of writing and visual art with no limits or specifications in theme.

Visit our website and submit via form.

We are looking forward to hearing from you