



P A N E L

March 2019 / Issue #3

Contemporary writing & art from Central Eastern Europe

Translations
of Hungarian
poetry

Winners of our art
contest and their
works

An interview with
István Orosz and an
excerpt from his new
novel

An exclusive translation
from Alberts Bels's novel
Insomnia

Illustration by Lyuda Martynova

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Impressum

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Editorial note

What is it about winter months in Budapest that makes one want to hurl oneself into the icy blackness of the Danube so that the last anyone sees of one is a ghost-white hand clawing the air, unable to find purchase upon the river's tessellated surface before sinking into frigid oblivion? Probably the weather.

Well, we at Panel are pleased to note that winter is squarely in the rear-view, and fading fast. We have entered that special season in which even speculating aloud about the possibility of winter's return is likely to result in whatever is near at hand being balled up and pitched at your head.

Yes, springtime is for denial, procreation, and the slow but inexorable march toward days and nights spent outdoors at bars and music festivals, as well as toward smelling like you've spent days and nights outdoors at bars and music festivals. That's why we are pleased to introduce our third issue: a little thicker, a little more polished, a few more of the bugs worked out in the process that brings you, our faithful customers, the finest art and English language literature Central and Eastern Europe has to offer. It is our hope that, as you set out on your spring adventures, you will do so with Panel tucked neatly into your rucksack or back pocket, to be read on the trail or on the patio of a cafe.

Over the last four months we've continued our mission to expand Panel, both to showcase a wider swathe of the art and literature this diverse region has to offer, and to reach new and larger audiences. We're happy to announce the foundation of a creative association, the Panel Irodalmi Egyesület (Panel Literary Association), which will help us to further our creative goals and our goal of being mistaken for a real magazine from a distance on a hazy day if you sort of squint your eyes.

Our delightful and infectious sense of humor aside, this issue wouldn't exist without the hard work of the committed and generous people that have donated their time and energy to making it a reality. We have some brilliant pieces this time around, from contributors in parts as varied as Bulgaria, Germany, Latvia, and, of course, from contributors right here in Budapest.

We'd like to extend our special thanks to the talented people at Painter's Palace, who orchestrated the competition for this issue's cover art, to Vad art kiállítás for their cooperation and to Jancsó Art Gallery, which provided a space where those pieces could be exhibited.

Last of all, we'd like to thank you, the reader. Without an audience, Panel would be meaningless. We're grateful you've given us this opportunity to expose you to the talented artists and writers that lurk between issue three's covers.

We're glad you're reading; we're reading, too.

The editors of Panel



Illustration by Sandor Sipos

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Glory and Bitter

István Orosz

An excerpt from the novel *Chess on the Island*

Translated by Patrick Mullaney

Istvan Orosz's novel Chess on The Island has not yet been translated into English, though it's available in Russian, and soon in Slovakian and Italian. The novel, which is neither purely documentary, nor entirely fiction, takes place on the island of Capri, where future key members of the Bolshevik party and, later, the revolution, met to play chess. Here, Panel publishes an exclusive translation of one chapter of this novel, with a follow-up interview with Istvan Orosz on page 66.

Naturally, Gorky, the host, can also remain in the picture. He, too, has a real name: Alexei Maximovich Peshkov. In chess, *peshkov* means pawn. Foot soldiers: *peshka*, *peshek*. Gorky, on the other hand, means bitter. It is under this pseudonym that the artistic community has come to know him since his *Makar Chudra* in 1892. His surprisingly translucent light green eyes constantly exude a sort of intangible Slavic melancholy. His giant Adam's apple bobs up and down between his collar and his droopy, tobacco-smelling moustache whenever he spits—sometimes into a cuspidor, sometimes into a handkerchief. He's a rail-thin construction—a wobbly, imposing skeleton balanced on wiry tendons. Over his peasant shirt with its standing collar (*koszovorotka*), he wears American braces and curls long, wavy hair that falls over his forehead and around his finger as

he talks. Now he is sporting a hat, and the brown curls are covered. He has haemorrhoids, like any writer worth his salt, so he prefers to stand, or to lean upon the terrace railing. He is the villa's most well-known resident.

Indeed, probably the most famous person on the island. Half of Europe follows him. Munich's *Simplicissimus* doesn't just carry anyone's caricature. *Simplicissimus* is Parvus' favourite weekly, and Lenin often knocked at the doctor's elegant flat in Schwabing just to flip through it in case there was something relevant to Russia. Of course, the Old Man won't mention *Simplicissimus* now, because then Parvus will come up, which might result in more tension. For the time being, it won't do to get Gorky's moustache in a twist. He has clearly become tangled up in the affair.

Alexander Lvovich Parvus has come up before—if only in the fine-print of a footnote. That suits him, the tiny marginal mention, since he is always seeking to disappear into the background, even if that is not especially feasible on account of his physical attributes. He is an enormous bear: 24 stones, with short legs, eyes the colour of kelp and the sort of pot belly one sees only on tycoons in newspaper caricatures (*Simplicissimus*). His fat fingers glitter with signet rings, and, when he sneezes, he sneezes mightily into a gold-lidded snuffbox. He is incapable, even, of hiding behind his strange Latin alias (Parvus

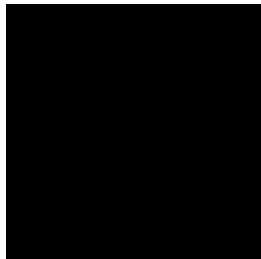
meaning little). He was present at the first revolution, and, having witnessed the ineffectualness of the clumsy revolutionaries, became determined to help.

Those who attempt to decode his real name—Dr. Helphand—in English, believe they are receiving a helping hand, but those who hear it pronounced—Helfand—are more closely reminded of an elephant that had been set loose in a china shop. His help, of course, should not be construed as charity. After all, Parvus (we will call him by the name Gorky uses to refer to him) is wont to view the revolution exclusively from a business perspective.

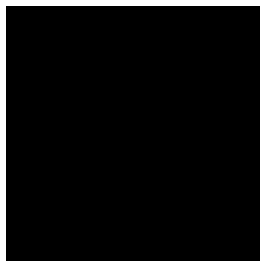


An illustration from the book *Chess on the Island*

He has a brilliant mind (a student of Nietzsche), but his thoughts revolve exclusively around money. He is the merchant of the revolution, its trafficker, broker, dealer, profiteer



- biographers will not flatter him with their epithets. He has set out to be Europe's richest man and predicts that the overthrow of the Tsar's empire will be a means to that end.

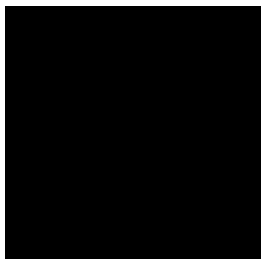


All manner of things are necessary for a revolution. Besides materials and liaisons, it's good to have a leader with a characteristic profile — someone to model statues after,

write books about, who won't balk at playing the marionette. What's more, such a man might not even notice the strings being used to manipulate him.



Parvus' first choice was Trotsky, but it was soon clear that he was excessively headstrong. He was too easily carried away, was a hopeless idealist. Lenin, though, was



slower on the up-take. He was less of a charismatic orator, however, and, in terms of external attributes, not a patch on the matinee idol Trotsky (whose hairstyle, alone, was sheer revolt). Lenin was much more impressionable, and he had long looked up to Parvus (which we need not only read figuratively, given their foot disparity in height). They met in 1900, and Parvus immediately convinced Lenin to publish *Iskra*, even offered him the use of his press in Munich. The house in Schwabing, where the printing press clattered away in the cellar, became a meeting place for Russian emigrees and left-wing German intellectuals. Parvus is already a member of the Socialist-Democratic party, and, in that capacity, has tried to raise money for emigrees grumbling about the Tsar and for striking workers in Italy. He tends his own garden too, of course, usually on the go as an arms trader (disguising merchandise in shipments of grain or condoms, if necessary), delighting in each new outbreak of war. He is a Freemason and a communist, although he is capable of becoming, from one day to the next, an advocate of aviation, of the suffrage movement or the founding of a football club, depending on how he stands to profit. He awes Lenin, only three years his

junior, with his ability to foresee everything. He has predicted the eruption of war in Japan, Russia's subsequent loss, and that the humiliating peace would lead, first, to internal dissatisfaction, then to 1905 Revolution (indeed he not only predicted the uprising and the outbreak of the revolution: his crowning invention was the "creative channelling" of enemy funds — in this case, yen — into publications by opposition emigrees or, to speak frankly, into the propaganda machine. Which worked). Now, he will also have you believe that a world war is on the horizon.

He expresses himself so simply and precisely that it is impossible to doubt him. He gathers all his information from newspapers — or, more precisely, by following the trail of news stories. The papers lie shamelessly but coherently. One can discern the truth remarkably well through the opposition's lies. He has the dailies read out by three secretaries in three languages, while dictating in a fourth. It's no accident that the many, small, German-speaking states have formed an alliance. They want colonies of their own, not to mention a larger market for all the crap rolling off their assembly lines.

For now, they view Turkey as an ailing country, perhaps the easiest to secure territory from. Because of Russia's misadventure in Japan, the Tsar can no longer go east. Later, he, too, will need the Bosphorus if he should care to go sailing on the seven seas. He dreams of a great Slavic federation with a new capital at its centre: Istanbul, Constantinople, Byzantium. He does not dare write out its new name, being superstitious, but he does pronounce it from time to time: Tsargrad. A third Rome.

The German Emperor was even willing to join with old Franz Joseph to get his hands on the Balkans: Bosnia-Herzegovina are already occupied. It is only a matter of time before the annexation is announced, whenever they feel strong enough to break bread with the Tsar over the question of the Slavs. Because not even the Russians will let that pass without a word. The fact that they saved both Germany and Austria—the first from Napoleon, the second from Lajos Kossuth—means nothing to them. Nations, like people, tend toward ingratitude. It does not bother Ilyich, now, that the ruling cousins of Europe are donning their captain's uniforms and parading in them—they will dive for each other's throats as soon as it suits their interests. What was merely a fantasy of Marx and Engels is being made real: the world

war. There will be a world war, which might be made into a class war on a worldwide scale.

In 1908, Parvus went to Istanbul to collect an advance paid to secret operatives for igniting the Turkish Revolution. This, in German marks, Russian rubels and Austro-Hungarian crowns. He did not rub it in Lenin's face, but, instead, managed to convince him that the interests of Germany and Russia were in conflict—to put it mildly. In other words, since they yearned for the same territories, they would be forced to go to war.

He explains, "It will be in the Germans' interest to weaken the Tsar from the inside—that is, they will help the Russian revolutionaries. They'll help you with money, and believe me, Ilyich, they have plenty of money."

The sausage fingers begin crumpling Lenin's coat lapel.

"Plenty, and it's going to pour."

For a moment, it occurs to the Old Man that Parvus may have offered the German socialist-democrats money from the Tsar for their own uprising, that he might have urged them on, too, with the prospect of Russian rubles, but then something else comes to mind. He thinks of Elizaveta, of Liza, how well she had decoded the restaurant menus in Rome, how Italian her gestures had suddenly

become, and how they smiled at her as if she were a regular at the *albergo* beside the Pantheon where she had her luggage taken. Under Parvus' influence, Lenin has begun to pay attention to world politics, to take an interest in the interrelation of international events.

Parvus, for his part, is happy to instruct him: "The Tsar is insignificant. It doesn't matter what he wants. Russia is ruled by two men, an iron-fisted reformer and a mad monk, Stolypin and Rasputin. They differ in every respect, but they're equally opposed to war. They must be swept aside. Of course, the people will oppose it, too. The peasants will be against it when they learn that the outbreak of war will mean a ban on alcohol, but they can't see past their own noses. Everything can be calculated perfectly, my friend, even if random events occasionally upset our plans."

He inhales with a whistle.

"If history needs an excuse to have a world war, believe me, it will find one. History, in its great big laboratory, has already begun to make trials: hauling a wayward prince before a firing squad, slitting the throats of converted shop owners, steering a night-time fishing jaunt into the path of a fleet of cruisers, castrating a consul, busting a faggot spy, stabbing an old man with a kitchen knife, or, somewhere, driving a crown prince into a bullet just as it happens to fly by. Take your pick. Choose your favorite *casus belli*. No doubt about it, there will be war. Maybe somewhere they're already sewing the dummies dressed in enemy uniforms that are to be tied to the front of military trains like during the Japanese War. The most important question is: How many uniforms will they need?"

Bio note: Patrick Mullowney



Having graduated from New York University in 2000, with bachelor's degrees in mathematics and playwriting, he pursued a career as a playwright and dramaturge in the city for two years before relocating to Budapest, where he still resides. Currently, his focus is Hungarian drama literature and translation. Patrick has translated plays to English for nearly all the prominent theatre venues in Hungary.

Heat Warning

Gabi Csutak

Translated by Ildikó Noémi Nagy

As we leave the mountain country, it seems like we've plunged into the heat very suddenly. There's nothing else to see except the stark fields and the black lines splitting and rejoining between the teetering telephone poles in the sharpening light. Only the thickening weave of wires signifies the approaching city. By the time we reach Bucharest, I'm swept along towards the exit beneath an utterly tangled net. The guide book says this is the City of Joy.

Adrian's standing around at the edge of the platform with exaggerated nonchalance, as if he'd just happened to wander in out of boredom, and since he's already here, he might as well hang around and watch the trains a bit. We scan each other's faces for a few seconds, like terrain features we've never seen before, like the surfaces of distant planets. Then everything runs its course as it should: kisskiss, backpack off, backpack on, jeez it's hot, how was your trip, let's go.



Illustration by Lyuda Martynova



Illustration by Lyuda Martynova

Adrian carries my hand and my hand drags me after it, like dead weight. Train steam, bleach smell, crepes, shreds of words, a loudspeaker. Then on we go, through the white-hot strip of light, our shoes nearly sticking to the pavement, sizzling sweat on the back of my neck, hot oil. Right before it all becomes intolerable, we dip into the chill of the subway. How nice it would be to stand here, swaying to the rhythm of these incomprehensible station names, until the buildings scorching above us cooled down. In gibberish, I hum magic words invoking rain.

Yet the heat is unrelenting. By the time we reach the surface, the city has become a desert: a dry river bed, rusty pipes, and rubble in place of the road. A scaffold on every building; it's as if we are walking among movie sets, as if nobody lives behind the windows covered in green netting. If someone does happen to be here, they'll have dissolved long ago into the endless afternoon slumber settling upon the whole city. We're the only ones tripping along the makeshift sidewalk of planks, yet there are eyes watching us from the depths of trenches. Adrian explains that it's street kids and stray dogs huddling between the pipes. There's nothing to fear, but it's better to avoid their gaze. A sudden gush of water: a mud-colored cascade bursts forth, and all the kids are suddenly

shrieking and splashing, as if spewed out by the pipe. I can only watch them with longing; Adrian says we can take a dip pretty soon too. He knows the place for us.

At the next corner we jump off the plank sidewalk with great momentum, as if it were diving board. Of course there's no water, but the street scene suddenly changes: now we're walking on concrete, among ten-story apartment blocks. There are people on the streets here now; many are bunched up in the strips of shade. But it still feels like we're on a set. Certain buildings are almost entirely shrouded in



Illustration by Lyuda Martynova

advertisement banners that are several stories high. Several people cross themselves in front of an enormous picture of a plane. Adrian takes me behind the mantle. Two tower blocks flank a small, onion-domed church unbelievably tightly. The cool scent of frankincense hits me.

He's already leading me on without a word, through gaps between grey wedges, always a step in front of me, always on the shady side. Sometimes I let myself be dragged along like a kid, but then I come to my senses and do my best to keep up. Finally, I spot green grass between two buildings, and I know that's where we're headed. And already we're running so we can make it up the steep embankment. When we reach the top, I almost stagger from the light. An enormous artificial lake stretches before us. The line of the opposite shore nearly blends into the horizon.

A garbage strip stretches between the concrete slabs and the lake's greasy surface. For a moment I think we're seeing wild ducks floating in an orderly formation, but as we get closer, it turns out they're only green plastic bottles. They wedge themselves into a neat row among the shoreline's jumble of tin cans, condoms, and plastic bags. Adrian looks around triumphantly—as if we have just reached a mountain peak after a hard climb—and he's already throwing off his clothes.

I don't want to disappoint, so I start undressing too. Shards of glass cover the uneven concrete. The only way I dare approach the water is by holding my breath before I leave the top of the embankment. I don't succeed in jumping over the entire width of the debris. I kick my legs wildly to shake off the slime of unidentifiable origin caught between my toes. The water is surprisingly cold, even though the heat wave has been going strong for days. Adrian keeps quiet about how we're floating over a church

Illustration by Anissa Casarella



and a cemetery right now. Maybe because he more-or-less believes the urban legend that its the desecrated graves that make the water so cold, and, of course, that's also why so many people have drowned here.

As we swim further in, the outline of a chapel slowly becomes distinct above the water. It's not a chapel, it's a fountain: Adrian answers my unasked question. Only later does he explain that this is all that remains of The Leader's last grandiose plan: the half-completed fountain and a few scraggly palm trees. They shot him before he was able to move into this carefully designed Garden of Eden.

We have a hard time clambering out of the lake because of the slippery slime stuck to the concrete. By the time we reach the top, our hair is completely dry. We start along the embankment. The scorching heat dries even my thoughts. I feel a bit dizzy. I close my eyes and let Adrian lead me. Don't worry, the market's just here, he says, before I start to worry. After a few steps I can smell the fermenting vegetables and used cooking oil, but I only open my eyes in the shade of the mountains of watermelon. Adrian is refreshed by the commotion. He gleefully sniffs, crumbles, taps, tastes. The number of little packages in his hand increases; pretty soon he has one hanging from every finger, but he won't let me help. He lifts out an uncannily large tomato from somewhere, offering it to me from his cupped palms as if it were spring water to drink. I'd love to dip my face into it. He calls it a rose tomato. Later, he proudly tells me that back home, even during the greatest poverty, there was at least one tomato that could be made into a salad to feed the family.

All the feast is missing now is cheese. Customers pinch the translucent slices off knife tips with devout expressions. Adrian is among the worshippers. When a vendor offers him whey

cheese and the quivering, white morsel slips off the blade, he licks it from the woman's palm without a second thought. Desire surges in me for the first time. We'll be swimming in it for days, shrieking like the street kids. Adrian's steps quicken.

As we step out of the market, we feel only the heat again, vibrating on the grey wedges. I hear a metallic noise. A bit too late, Adrian warns me not to look back. The nails of stray dogs scrape concrete behind us. They're hoping for something. We cut across a playground. A few kids sit around in the shade of a slide. The older ones have crosses, the younger ones have apartment keys hanging around their necks. A few more paces and finally, we too can catch our breath in the shade, as if we had almost drowned but managed to surface at the very last moment. Only after a few breaths do we notice the old lady sitting beside us on a stool in front of the apartment block's entrance. She has the same dreamy expression as the kids on the playground. A bit further on, another woman peels potatoes. For minutes, we can hear the tubers splash at regular intervals into the dirty-white wash basin.

Adrian steps through a glass door. No, not yet, he says, though I was just about to collect my breath in a sigh of relief. I inhale the air, reeking of garbage, but cooler than outside as we pass through the stairwell. Adrian asks me to

close my eyes. He leads me out of the back: a creaking sound, a slam, and a few more steps along the soft, uneven ground. "Okay, now," he says. I open my eyes. We're in an overgrown, village garden.

I trace my finger over the bark of a sour cherry tree. It really is there, and the cherries are too, as are the intertwined raspberry and gooseberry bushes. Intoxicated, I move further along the path: quince, pear, a scraggly acacia, two beds full of green onions and dill, and finally, behind the rosebushes and enormous purple hydrangeas, stands the village cottage overrun with wild grapevines. Adrian escorts me like a magician about to make me disappear into a magic cabinet. Every moment hangs beside the next, caught on the thorns of gooseberry bushes.

Adrian lays a thick quilt on the grass, thrusts a stake down at each corner, then knots a sheet onto them. This will be our canopy bed. I can hardly wait to dive under the fluttering, bluish-white linen. That is exactly why his movements are so slow, to juxtapose my impatience. I accept the rules of the game: he must prolong my yearning as long as possible. I trust his instinct for proportion, his senses, even though I don't know anything about him except that huge tomatoes grow in his garden back home. Anything that can't be observed, touched, or sniffed doesn't interest me right now.

He lays a tablecloth on the grass. I obediently settle down at the edge with my legs folded. A vein in my neck throbs faster and faster as I watch his movements: he smooths his hand across the tomato, nearly opens by itself, before cutting equal segments and carefully arranging them around the hair-thin slices of cheese; cutting off the stalks of the green onions; smelling his fingers after he's sprinkled dill onto the whey cheese stirred until it's creamy; and pressing the bread against his hip as he cuts the first slice.

He touches the bone of my ankle with the tip of his finger like someone tasting unfamiliar food. With a gesture meant to be casual,

I divert the touch that slides up to the back of my neck, along with a stray lock of hair. I don't want to break the rules of the game. That way, it's even more unexpected when he really does taste me in the very next moment, so self-evidently and easily, barely touching the cotton that's slipped aside, as if I'd have already been naked for a long while. At night, we take down the sheet that's knotted to the stakes so we can see the shining windows of the block towers bowing over us. Several times I'll dream that they cave in, and the only reason it doesn't happen is because in Adrian's dreams the shining towers are there to shoot us into outer space.

Bio note: Gabi Csutak



Gabi Csutak (1977) is a Hungarian writer. Her first collection of short stories *Csendélet sárkánnyal (Still Life with Dragon)* was published in 2017. She represented Hungary at the European First Novel Festival in Budapest 2018. In the same year she got in the finals of the most prestigious Hungarian first book competition Margó-díj and received the special prize of the Publishing Hungary Program. Some of her texts were translated into Bulgarian, Croatian, English, Estonian, Polish and Serbian.

Bio note: Ildikó Noémi Nagy



Ildikó Noémi Nagy (1975) has been a freelance writer and translator of Hungarian literature and film since 1998.

Midnight

Alberts Bels

An excerpt from the novel *Insomnia*

Translated by Jayde Will

1

I was sitting in a deep, worn-out lounge chair, in which Mr. Darzins had so enjoyed sprawling out back in the old days. I was reading a book and smoking a pipe with pleasant-smelling tobacco. Although low temperatures had persisted for a few nights, the window facing the street was open, and my legs were kept pleasantly warm by a soft camel-hair blanket. The hands of the enormous clock, the first a short, fat man like Sancho Panza, the second a tall, slender, man like Don Quixote, were approaching midnight.

Having put the book down on my lap and having immediately forgotten the sentence I had just read, I listened to sharp, nervous steps coming from the street. Pointy heels clicked closer and closer, their knocking on the asphalt reminding one of the rhythm of telegraph keys. I could hear fear and bewilderment in the steps. The clock rang out slowly, uncannily.

I moved to the window, where I saw a woman running from the direction of the lake. After a few steps she stopped and looked back. Turning her head and shoulders, the slender figure in a grey, nylon raincoat froze for a moment, then she ran on ahead. She was looking

for a building or courtyard to hide herself in, that much was clear. Her entire bearing attested to this; the insomnia had sharpened my senses.

She pulled on the gates. They were closed. She ran further on and arrived at Jauniks's building. It was there that she stopped for a moment.

She couldn't hide in Jauniks's courtyard, above all because it was surrounded by a fence made of high boards, with two lines of barbed wire, two and a half meters off the ground, like a defense battalion of prickly hedgehogs. The gates were shut, and a terrifying dog called Koba lay in the yard, an angry and uncontrollable beast. People had witnessed Jauniks walking him, hitting his dog with a six-tailed whip. Only then did Koba give in, yelping and howling pitifully, and two or three beads of sweat would drip from his master's brow onto the dog's shiny combed back. Then you understood that hitting the dog after it ran after a passing bitch was a difficult job, an unpleasant job.

Jauniks was a strange and secretive man. I didn't know where he was from, or what he occupied himself with. He was retired, and, upon seeing him the first time, an



Photo by Laukó Magdolna

inexplicable disquiet inhabited my soul, as if I had met a person who held a great secret inside himself. He was a handsome, stocky, sixty-five-ish gentleman of average height: yes, really, a true gentleman (the only thing that didn't fit with this was perhaps the dog whip), impeccably dressed, with perfect manners, a smooth gait, a quiet and taciturn man who disappeared behind the high fence of his private home. A cultivated garden, apple trees, plum trees, gooseberry bushes, and lilacs were very much visible from my window. No one knew anything at all about Jauniks. Even Mrs. Grizkalniete would throw up her hands if asked, saying she didn't want to talk about it, and that meant something. It was said that he had a bad liver, a dismal past, a hopeless future; to tell the truth it didn't interest me much. What value is there in rumors, gossip, and the tittle-tattle of women?

She stood near to Jauniks' house for a moment. I could see that she was thinking of whether to run further or to try to pull the gates open. After looking over the barbed wire fence, she ran on, and I was surprised not to hear the barking and growling of the dog. It was nowhere to be seen. I glanced up toward the far end of the street, but could not see her pursuers. Once she was more or less opposite my window, I yelled:

"Hello!"

She jumped, rushed to the side of the street, stopped and looked up.

"What's going on?" I asked. "Was there an accident?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Can I help?"

She said nothing more, but opened the gate, went through the small garden and stopped at my front door. It was locked. I threw the

key down to her, clinking a few times as it skipped to a halt on the footpath. A moment later she was in the house. I stepped out into the corridor, and opened the door to the stairwell. She was standing right in front of me.

She was about twenty-five. The corners of her mouth had settled into an expression characteristic of pessimism, and she had dark bags under her eyes, likely smeared eyeliner. Her clothes were wrinkled.

It was dark in the corridor, and I couldn't see anything more. From the open door of my room, a little path of light stretched over the carpet. Without saying a word, she went along this path into the room and at once went over to the window. Leaning a little over the windowsill, she looked towards the lake, then turned around and leaned with her back against the windowsill as if waiting for me to say something. The glass of the

open window threw a reflection from the lamp on her cheek. A sliver of light fell on her temples, and for a moment I thought that the lamp had moved, but then I realized that she was clinging to her last ounce of strength so as not to collapse on the floor. Her eyes fluttered closed, but I was already there, and caught her in my arms and took her to the couch.

Though my medical knowledge is rather limited, I could say with certainty that she had not fainted. Deep, regular breathing, an expression of absolute peace on her face, and a strong, normal pulse bore witness to the fact that she was in a deep sleep. I found a pillow for her, put it under her head and fluffed it, and, after hesitating a moment, removed the woman's coat. She did not wake. Nor did she wake a moment later when the entire building was jarred by a chilling scream.

2 The longer I looked at this unknown person sleeping on my couch, the clearer it became to me that she hadn't seen warm water for at least a week. Her neck and forehead were grey. A dirty layer of powder covered her cheeks, and her dark hair hung in greasy tufts. I bent down and took off her shoes, and I saw that the shoes were black from sweat and that her pantyhose was

torn in several places. Her facial features were symmetrical and even beautiful, but could not make up for the overall impression, and I understood how poor my judgment had been regarding this woman.

I decided to heat up the metal stove in the bath with some wood, warm up the water and tell her to take a bath. What did it matter if she was a woman of dubious





integrity, why should she have to be dirty, too? I put on my leather jacket, took the keys and put on my slippers without putting on my shoes and went downstairs to the cellar. The firewood was already chopped. I collected a good armful, and returned to the apartment. Ten minutes later, the fire was at full blast. Crackling flames raced into the air vent, and a yellow flame could be seen blowing about through a crack in the stove. The water having heated in the basin, I turned off the tap, mixed twenty or so grams of bath liquid in the water, and hung my robe on the hook next to the tub. Since buying a new robe, this one had been lying in my wardrobe, unused. Afterwards, I went to wake the stranger up. I thought that it would take at least an hour to rouse her from her deep sleep, but it was enough to grip her firmly by the shoulder and say “get up” in a stern voice. She opened her eyes.

“Go to the bathroom,” I said. “Wash up. I will make the bed, and you can go back to sleep.”

She didn’t ask me anything, didn’t protest at all, but got obediently up and followed me like a sleepwalker. In the very next moment I became uneasy. I began to have doubts about whether I’d judged this woman correctly, but it was already too late to turn back.

“You can lock the door with the hook,” I said. “It’s a communal apartment, someone could walk

in on you. Look, here’s the soap, there’s a towel there. When you’re done, put on that robe.”

She quickly began to undress. I closed the door. She fastened the hook, and I listened for a moment. Water splashed in the tub and then the woman made a sound like a giant cat purring.

She was in the bath for a long time, but I didn’t dare to return to the room. I was afraid that she might fall asleep in the tub and drown. In my soft slippers I paced from one end of the corridor to the other. Finally, the water stopped splashing, the shower was turned on, and then I could be certain she would not fall asleep. I returned to my room, and put sheets and blankets on the couch.

When I went to the corridor, Asters, my neighbor, damn him, was trying to get the bathroom door open.

“Oh!” he said surprised, “I thought that it was you taking a bath in there.”

Unfortunately, it was only possible to get to the toilet through the bathroom, and Asters had been suddenly overcome with the need to visit there after the horrible screaming.

The little hook clicked in the bathroom. The door popped open, and I took a few steps back, breathless. Asters gaped, then a broad smile slid across his face. The unknown woman stood totally

naked in front of us, her clothes hanging over my striped robe on the hook in the bathroom. She went past us, and, with the expression of a sleepwalker, went into my room as surely as if it were her own. I heard the creaking of the couch springs and the rustling of the blanket. I would have never believed that a woman could walk so nonchalantly naked through a stranger's apartment, but I had seen it with my own eyes.

"And I thought it was Ulrika in there! But you've already got another beauty!" said Asters. He burst out laughing so hard his eyes narrowed to slits and his mouth stretched almost to his ears. There could be no doubt about the conclusions he had drawn after seeing this woman, naked as Eve in the Garden of Eden, come out of the bath and into my apartment. It must be said that, from what I managed to see in the short moment she stood on the threshold, she had been totally transformed by the bath. I have to admit, I had mistaken her age. This unknown girl could not have been more than nineteen or twenty years old. Asters, though, had not been mistaken in calling her a beauty, as hers was a body truly worthy of admiration.

It didn't occur to me to explain anything to Asters. Let the man fantasize about whatever he wants. I returned to the room. The unfamiliar girl was laying down, fast asleep. She could get up and fall asleep quickly, like an animal. Or

do a marvelous job of looking and acting like it. A person knows very well what they need most in any particular moment, which is why I decided not to disturb her sleep, or ask her anything until she had slept. One shouldn't force things. I kept that in mind. All I could do to help her with was to let her sleep. Even a child could have understood that. But then I had to think about her, about her nakedness under the blanket. She was so beautiful, so shapely, so young, and blindly obedient, and all kinds of thoughts thrust themselves upon me: that I could take her without any effort, that in her half-asleep state she would give herself up to me. I wanted to undress and lie down beside her, but instead I went to the window and looked out.

A girl, totally unknown to me, was sleeping on my couch. I didn't know who she was, why she had entered my room, how long she was going to sleep: why she ran from the direction of the lake at night, or who she was running from, why she so obediently obeyed my orders, and another thousand and one whys. The last of which was, why did I care? Perhaps she wasn't running. Perhaps she was walking in the late evening, struggling with herself, with her delusions. So why was I imagining all this? I knew very well why I called to her, why I invited her up, why I told her to bathe and made the bed with clean sheets, what all of those unnecessary ruminations were about—some sort of phlegm of the conscience. I didn't care.

3 The time comes and a person finds out everything. I also found out.

She had spent several nights in a row at the station, in the waiting area for the shuttle buses, where a crosswind blew, where people walked non-stop, where the militia would check documents every hour, asking that age-old question "Where are you traveling?" slow-witted officers not understanding that she wasn't traveling anywhere, that she didn't have anywhere to travel to. Where was she going to go? It didn't matter where, she said a station, named some place in a province very far from Riga, some place the train left for early in the morning, and she was allowed to stay on a bench in the crosswind and hubbub, but under a roof and in a little warmth. She dozed and her head jerked periodically up as if she was praying to the Creator, but her deity was sleep. She dozed off and dreamed of sleep. She didn't dream anything big, no, only little things. She wanted little things: to sleep at night in a waiting area meant for passengers traveling longer distances, where it was warm, instead of more or less warm, and where the benches were soft, upholstered with fake leather, and each evening she tried to sneak into this area and stay the night. She almost managed once, but the railway gods and militia gods came at midnight, checking the documents of the people in this paradise, where it reeked of sausages, rye bread and



Illustration by Lyuda Martynova

foreigners. When they checked her documents, they found that she didn't belong there and chased her downstairs to a cold bench in an unheated area in the crosswind (it was also more or less warm), where the militia let her sleep, just so she could doze off sitting up. If she risked lying down on the bench, then a blue uniform would pull her onto her feet during his next round because she was feeble, whereas the militia were as vain as peacocks in their sense of power, in their stupidity. There were also good militia, civilized blue-uniformed officers, a large majority of them world-wise men who allowed her to sleep in the crosswind on the cold (though more or less warm) bench the whole night—the whole night right until morning, right up to the morning.

In the spring she found a building in Riga's Old Town and snuck into it—heart trembling—in the middle of the night. There was a bench in the stairwell on the first floor, but the first night she didn't dare lay down there. She listened half-sitting, worried that someone might open the door downstairs, that someone might come to strangle her, to rape her, to ravage her, however, nothing of the sort happened, only a tenant, coming back late, passing her in a rush, an intoxicated daze, without even noticing her lonely form on the bench. That was even scarier. He didn't even see her. No one, no one, one, one. That entire city was snoring away on its couches, in its

beds, on its seaweed and spring beds, but she, Dina, had gotten very cold early in the morning, her clothes frozen through, and climbed up the stairs, and the gust of warm air coming from one of the apartments through a crack in the door reminded her like a painful lash of the people sleeping in warmth, in comfort, slumbering through the night.

In the morning she went to the station, washed up in the bathroom, did her hair, had breakfast at the station's buffet and went to work. She worked in a printing house as an assistant. Now and then, in the evenings after work, she would visit friends, and try to stay long enough that they would offer to let her stay the night. Then for one night she would be happy. But around three nights a week she didn't have a place to sleep. However, she remained proud, didn't ask for help, thought it over, decided to hold out for another month or so while she looked for a house for herself. She had been living like that for a couple months already since two overweight, kind hearted Latvians—a husband and wife—had kicked her out.

Late one night she was walking past the restaurant Riga and toward a building in the old town, and a woman stopped her.

"Help me. Help me get this animal home," she said.

The animal was standing on the sidewalk, swaying slightly, his

legs spread wide, stocky, content with himself and the whole world. The animal had the face of an honest, happy, average Joe. The animal appeared benevolent in his satisfaction, like a well-fed pig, and wouldn't move from his spot.

"I am a robot," he said, "Tick, tock, tick, tock!"

The woman prodded him, pushed him, swore at him, pulled him along, almost spit on him, but this happy animal just carried on in his new role.

"I am a robot," he said, "Tick, tock, tick, tock!"

He appeared so obviously immovable, that Dina understood strength would not be of any use. To be honest, she hadn't wanted to get involved in the first place. She had wanted to walk past them, like so many that had walk past before her, but curiosity had won out. What would happen if she tried to turn the robot on, tick, tock, tick, tock, You Latvian, overweight shlub, you slave to your stomach, move, my dear man, tick, tock, tick, tock, you Latvian. Maybe it will work. Let's see what he does.

"Click!" Dina touched the man's shoulder, a shoulder dressed in a good coat. Under that good coat was, tick, tock, a jacket that was just as good, tick, tock, and a button-down shirt that was just as good.

"What?"

"Click! I turned you on. You're a

robot, aren't you?"

"I'm a robot! Tick, tock, tick, tock!"

"Then you have to go! You're turned on."

The humane, ceaselessly good-natured, honest, happy Joe, that overweight animal, swung around and came up with an unexpected right hook, trying to hit the woman that had asked Dina for help.

"Go away," the man said to the woman. "Go away!"

The woman shrieked and sidestepped his punch.

"You can't do that," Dina said.

"Excuse me. You probably pressed the wrong button. But I like you. You're not afraid of me?"

"No."

"Well, you're an honest person. I need an honest friend, I don't have one honest friend. Come with me, I will show you my boy, you see, I have a little tick-tock robot!"

And it was then that Dina felt what she could only feel once she stopped, that she was infinitely exhausted, endlessly tired—had had enough, her pride powerless against the iron shaft of life—that she'd go with this stocky, good-natured, honest Joe, despite having had men thrust such offers upon her before, both at the station and on the street, because they had been only men, the mere fact of their appearance raising suspicions, but this man was an

honest, good-natured, tick-tock, little robot, so she'd go with him, go just so she wouldn't have to spend the night on a bench in a building in the Old Town, go along, having also felt, once she stopped, that this woman, this lady of the evening from the restaurant, wasn't Dina's competition. Dina saw that the fat, good-natured Joe understood that. One fat Latvian, two fat Latvians, three fat Latvians. Long live the good-natured Latvians. Long live those good-natured lanky Latvians. Long live good-natured Latvians of all sorts, the short Latvians, the tall Latvians, the tick-tock little robots—the Latvians. And Dina sat in the taxi, together with that good-natured Joe, while the unhappy prostitute, the stupid fool, whose misfortune was to call for rescue, remained on the street, clenching her fists and elegantly expressing her opinion about dishonest competition.

At home he had a lovely, small, sleepy little tick-tock robot, a little boy, a velvety nose. He was all alone. Their villainous mother had left them, both.

"You, pretty girl, shouldn't have to waste away in some shitty printing house. Or do you think that sixty rubles isn't enough? You have a cute butt, and tits, and a small waist and a pretty face, and I, the little tick-tock robot, like you. What more do you want? Stay here with me. Live here as long as you want. Look, I'll kiss your little legs!"

Dina stayed. Within a few months her character softened. She relaxed, became so lazy that she didn't even protest when the fat, good-natured Joe said, blinking guiltily, "You understand, you can't live at my place anymore. Some things have come up. Don't get angry, but I've found you a room at someone else's place. Well then, I guess this is goodbye!"

And he gave her fifty rubles. He was a good man. Dina went to live at the place of the "someone else." She already knew him. The "someone else" had often thrown eager glances at Dina while visiting the tick-tock little robot. She lived there about a month, then took her rubles—this time just thirty—and moved on to the next "someone else." She slid ever lower, changed hands more and more often, until, finally, she happened upon a good girlfriend, who taught her the tricks of the trade, who took care of clients. That evening she had happened upon a perfectly acceptable client. She went with him, but he had turned out to be a sadist, a monster, a scumbag, and Dina was barely able to escape. The client had taken her to a small shed on a pier near the shore of the lake. Dina had ditched her bag and, later, gone into shock. "Some people would have crapped their pants in a situation like that," she told me, "but I fell straight to sleep. I can sleep anywhere, even on the street when I'm frightened. It was so crazy," she added.

I found all of this out the next morning, when Revolver Mike came in as I was leaving to accompany Dina downstairs to the front door, and Mike said that Dina changed men like hats. Then Dina told me everything with vindictive frankness, but for the time being I stood at the window, while an unknown girl slept on my couch. All I knew was that I had let her in because my Ulrika might, at that very moment, be far away in

a foreign city somewhere, on the street at night, looking for help. It could happen to anybody. Fate is not blind, then. Fate sees. And that is why I needed to call out to this woman, warm up her water in the bathtub, put clean sheets on the sofa, let her sleep, let her sleep, let her sleep, and not give a damn about what my neighbors thought, what the unhappy, nightmare-ridden Asters thought.

4

To live means to enjoy. After all, why shouldn't it? Even while doing something as inconsequential as crossing the street, I enjoy the roundness of the cobblestones under my feet, the earth's cheek, though masked, nestling up to my soles.

I believe that a person should take everything in life as it comes, and even more than that, you need to rob life like a bandit on the highway. A person comes into the world naked, but life dresses itself up in expensive furs, which is why bandits need to rob and plunder and put away as much as possible of the most beautiful things possible. In the end, everything gets taken away anyway. Robbing turns out to be either a hilarious vaudeville act or a bloody drama, and, as the curtain falls, bills will have to be paid and you will return to ashes and dust, not naked, as you arrived

in this world (decent burial rags will be your reward for so many years of looting and plundering), but, in reality, in nothing more than a narrow, uncomfortable mode of transport.

I happily succeeded in combining my perceived material life with successful studies, a happy marriage, a fulfilling daily routine, and, almost naturally, I began to wonder whether fate was preparing a trap for me, as it had seven hundred years ago. Or was it seven hundred and fifty? I couldn't remember exactly, although my memory, as I have mentioned, is otherwise faultless and, to the best of my knowledge, phenomenal.

Upon waking, I rejoiced in the day. I did the same thing at night while falling asleep. Going to work, I rejoiced in my work, and going home I did the same, rejoicing in my leisure time. And it was in that

all-encompassing joy that my life passed until the age of thirty. When I was young, everyone expected great things from me. They expected that, when I was older, I would become a part of their faction, their camp, what you might call a current, that current which is formed in the community of every city then it's no surprise that, in this incubation period of my personality, I didn't have enemies. I have to confess, I began to worry about it, and, upon acquiring my first enemy, I was no less pleased as one is with one's first ice cream in the sweltering heat of summer, as with one's first swim in the sea, one's first slalom skis, one's first flight in an airplane. As with one's first long separation.

"I will write you a letter every day," Ulrika said.

"Ulrika, dear, you won't have time."

"At least a postcard. At least two lovely words."

"I don't expect you to write. You won't have time. During the day there will be rehearsals, meetings, guided tours, foreign cities. Shops. In the evening you'll have to perform, dance. You know there won't be time."

"I'll write as often as I possibly can."

"Alright."

"Oh. We'll be going soon."

I kissed Ulrika four, five, six, seven times, because of a song that goes, "you kiss seven times." Seven, in

general, is a magic number. I am not really superstitious, which is why I kissed her an eighth time. Then the group leader couldn't stand it anymore, and literally pulled Ulrika from my embrace and pushed her into the train carriage. The train wheels clanged, the tracks groaned, the train shook and lurched forward. In what direction if not forward?

Love is a complicated primer; we turn page after page, learning to recognize one new letter after another. It may happen that, when you turn to the next page, the brilliance of your impressions will smother all those that came before. I am turning to the page about distances: the packing of your luggage, the ache of departure on the platform, of course, carefully concealed, the varnished sides of the wagon, the red cap and disdainful face of the station master who can't go anywhere.

My guiding principle is never to



Illustration by Anissa Casarella

5

cling to anything too dearly. Let everything flow past like clear, running water, let it sprint by like a rabbit on its light feet, then living isn't so hard. Up until now I've avoided marriage, that first among horrendous nooses. I've avoided familial relations, danger number two. In fact, it was easy for me to avoid danger number two, because I don't have a single living relative. I am all by my lonesome self. Ulrika may be the only one I've gotten too attached to lately. Perhaps that was the reason I was secretly ecstatic about our separation. For more than a month I would be alone again

Like a devil come down from the cross, I have been avoiding my social responsibilities; I have run away from aesthetics seminars, from various group activities; I have run away from communal work on Sunday; I have run away from collective visits to the theatre. I have run away from group tours, so in a sense my outlook is totally anti-social. I don't see any problem with it. More than anything, I hate crowds—crowds being any sort of large group of people that lack their own initiative, their own ideas.

I quickly and ably got free of the crowd of those accompanying me, and with a nod of my head I said goodbye to my acquaintances. It was a miracle that Ulrika's parents had not come to see their daughter off. I understood, it was most likely because they didn't want to meet me. They didn't have to do

that. I could've avoided coming. Ulrika's father and mother weren't exactly my biggest fans—a deviant, a womanizer, those were the most relatively mild of the epithets they had bestowed upon me. Ulrika dared to tell me those, and we both had a good laugh. Of course, going out with this young woman for two years, not expressing the slightest intention to be bound in matrimony, ignoring her parents' invitations to come and visit, seemed strange, to say the least. However, over the end of our time together a strange tenderness bound me ever more tightly to Ulrika. I even began to worry that I was getting old. Moreover, Ulrika lived at my place for three months, in my tiny communal flat. The craziest thing was that I had begun to get used to it all. I didn't want her to be either my common law wife, or my lawful wife, however, I didn't have the power to alter the balance of things, and now this trip had come along to save me. Well, Ulrika's parents were probably right. I really was a cold person, an egotist, with no pangs of conscience in regards to my whims and desires. And what was a pang of conscience anyway? It was a feeling of guilt—the awareness that you hadn't done everything in your power, that the world could be better, people happier. But I can't fix the world. It seems to me that everything on earth is fine as it is—the oppressed are oppressed, the free are free, the happy are happy, the unhappy are



Illustration by Agnieszka Filipow

not, and, as long as man continues living, evil also lives; a few bright souls will forever stand against evil, and the bonfire of Giordano Bruno will blaze eternally. I don't want to take part in that mess. I don't want to burn and I don't want to bring the logs to the fire. It's enough for me to stand to the side and watch. I know history adequately enough to say that the masses, which are called humanity, cannot be course corrected. In all lands, regardless of societal order, the prisons are full, while murderers and criminals rule. Then let it be. As long as I stand here calmly, no one can grab me by the neck, and, as long as no

one is grabbing me by the neck, I can stand here calmly.

Within my own four walls, I can feel like an absolute ruler. I can hang a picture of an orangutan on the wall and worship it, burn essential oils on the altar before it. I can dance the most dreadful dances, naked, and boil my fellow countrymen in a cauldron. I can demolish any economic or political system. I can write tracts crammed full with humanism and addressed to those living hundreds of years in the future—the citizens of the future. I can do nothing, lie quietly in my bed and die, die for eternity.





Who can guess why I want to be laid on my right side in the coffin, both hands under my head, fast asleep, sleeping for millions of years, billions of years in my shanty of flesh, in my one hundred and eighty-three centimeter long, seventy kilogram heavy shanty of flesh, only to reawaken after all those long years; I need to reawaken. I need to reawaken, because otherwise I will live my life just as shallowly as I have lived it up 'til now, and I won't have an excuse.

Between my four walls I can feel like a caged jaguar. I can gnaw at the iron bars of my cage, until my teeth become dull. I can growl my impotent rage to my prison guards, and they can simply laugh. I can be a humane jaguar, not tear apart the white rabbit they throw in as bait. I can eat nothing, quietly lie in the corner of my cage with eyes half-closed and die, die for eternity, and my skin will be stuffed by an old master and be put on display for the other jaguars as a warning.

Between my four walls I can feel

human, and that is the hardest, because I can feel how I am loved.

In reality, love is just a small lightbulb, a lightbulb of tiny happiness in the dark night. At night, when the earth is covered by darkness and people are covered by loneliness, during the night while the sky revolves around the earth like a giant barrel with a silver spigot, someone who has grown up only with this barrel, has been fed solely through this spigot and knows nothing of the world, knows less than we know, that someone opens the spigot and pitch black begins to rain down, and the black leaves you in a deep, icy hole, lost in loneliness—white lightning bolt flashing overhead like a dog howling pitifully at night, as the earth is cloaked in darkness and people are cloaked in loneliness.

So why should I lock that reflection in a ring? Gold in and of itself is not evil; people have made gold a stumbling block. Gold is a noble metal, but I don't want it. I definitely don't want to put love in a ring.

Bio note: Alberts Bels



Alberts Bels is one of Latvia's most celebrated authors. An author of fourteen novels and three short story collections. His work often deals with the struggle of individuals to free themselves from the iron grip of the Soviet regime. His numerous awards include an Order of the Three Stars, the highest civilian award in Latvia, and a Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2012 Latvian Literature Awards for his oeuvre. The excerpt featured in this issue is from the novel *Insomnia*, due out from Parthian Books in the Fall of 2019.

Minutes

Anna Leah

Rainy courtyards
 water running
 silence stirring
 The city rests on hot springs
 and caves of steam
 Leave your boots on the threshold
 the cold won't touch us in here
 your wet jeans, we'll lay with my washing

Dancing to tea-kettle whistle, we debate necessary levels of punk
 other variables
 like calcium
 its effect on you and your green



Photo by Laukó Magdolna

Some men, impervious, kiss when first near
 and ten o'clock in the morning
 Just as some women deliberately mishear
 answering cutting
 with mocking

Will the sun and its way
 ever reach them how it does
 the light in this courtyard? this page?

Radicalism makes your eyes lift
 hacking away at what held you

But we're feeling the slow moves of nature
 like the geological shift
 of Hungarian thermal pools south

And socks drying on a radiator

Bio note: Anna Leah

A writer and filmmaker, Anna Leah has lived in search of metaphor. It wasn't until finding a photograph of a Szecesszió staircase that her life was elevated by a new city. Questing from Brooklyn to Budapest, she found an incubator of affection and creativity that encouraged her to compose a collection of poetry in ten years, *In Pest And*. She is proud *Panel* is premiering two of those poems.

Boars At Dusk

Anna Leah

You asked me to tell the carved look of your long-time love
as she looks upon the Danube
she's borrowed your gestures

I see you within her

Woodland-eyed creatures with only the same desire for years
now hunted for affection
but found stars of crossing tails to protect

Your river-watcher in hoods of lace,
pulling them tighter to the stars asked her own wish
whispering, "I have so many problems"

And nature answered her
with the firmaments' punctuation of a meteorite

We climbed hills of wild mink and boar
wary of the need to make magic distract
and to understand worries' worth



We ran back down from footsteps on twigs
towards the voices of wild men
hearing danger echo

These boars may not be imagined
It's impossible to tell when this
blood-dipped curve of a tusk moon
sets under the river with its light

Questions are our water,
but that attracts animals
when dusk darkens

On this night of ghostly ways
the woman you love asks for shielding
even from her mother's house

Heart shaken, my hand steadies to hold her

*country man**
report poem

Zsuka Nagy
Translated by Gabor G Gyukics

I'd smoke all the tobacco in the world, I'd stuff the fog
in my cigarette he adds

he has hardly any his son will bring him some
tomorrow, the great plain is bluish green in his eyes,

the white of his eyes is a puli's dreadlock, barks, looking
at the flock leaning on his sheep-hook how

the face and palm of civilization ruins the land terra
incognita, man isn't the faithful companion of

man but the animal, the dog, the flock, this vastitude,
he points at the infinite boundary that he walks every
day *nye kupity* I read while he croaks and coughs
hitting his legs, has a stove in the wagon frozen white
bread on top, a torn slice, how can anyone be so poor
and happy, he looks at me, it's my flock and bible,
puts his jacket on his back smokes the fog down in his
cigarette but it becomes denser and denser.

**In the previous issue of Panel the poems of Zsuka Nagy were published with a with a misprint; their English and Hungarian versions did not match. We would like to apologize for this error. Here you can find the poems of Zsuka as they were meant to be published.*

tájember
riportvers

a világ összes dohányját elszívnám a ködöt is a
cigarettaimba tömném mutatja

alig van cigije hoz neki majd a fia holnap szemében
zöldes kék a puszta összeragadt puliszőr a szemefehérje
ugat a nyájra a botjára támasztva nézi hogy teszi tönkre
a földet a civilizáció arca tenyere terra incognita nem
az ember az embernek hű társa hanem az állat a kutya
a nyáj és ez a végtelen mutatja a határt amit naponta
bejár *nye kupity* olvasom az írást ő meg csak krárog
köhög csapkodja a lábát a vagonban van egy spór rajta
fagyott fehér kenyér leszakad darab hold hogy tud az
ember ilyen szegény lenni és egyszerre ilyen boldog
nekem a nyájam a bibliám néz rám zubbonyát a hátára
teszi a cigijébe szívja a sűrű ködöt de az csak annál
sűrűbb lesz



Photo by Eszter Fruzsina

m10

Zsuka Nagy
Translated by Gabor G Gyukics

since I love you it stopped raining the ambulances
run through the city shrieking their throbbing
palm size light pumps blood up on the black sky
since I love you you ask me often did I believe that
it'd happen with someone else what is now happening
with you, you're confronting me with the past, how many
times should I deny my past for you, I confess in a poem,
in infinite desire denying it before my mother, ashamed
before my father, heart effusion—heart vomit—heart ejecta
the whale spewing Jonah out, the past, spewing the old
one out since I love you I haven't told you that I stop everything
I screw up everything when things are great, take care but
not
only of me but of yourself with me too, because I make myself
forget you, be every timeline for me in this giant selfish
thing in my selfish oasis, want me if I do too, love me if I do
too,
be yet a woman a man the way I am, who he or she was you
are, who
was your she or he, one in the past that leaves like a cloud
trading places and the world grows up to us.

m10

mióta szeretlek nem esik az eső a mentők
üvöltve rohannak végig a városon lüktető
tenyérvényi fényük vért pumpál a fekete égre
mióta szeretlek sokszor kérdezted hittem-e
hogy mással lesz az ami veled számon kéred
tőlem a múltat hányszor tagadjam meg érted
vallom versben vég nélküli vágyban anyám
előtt tagadva apám előtt szégyellve szívömleny
szívokádék szívöklend cet köpi jónást régi köpi
a régit mióta szeretlek nem mondtam
mindent akkor hagyok abba mikor jó nagyon
mindent elrontok vigyázz és ne csak rám magadra is
velem mert magammal magadat elfelejtetem
maradj nekem minden idősíknak ebben a nagy
önző miben önző kis oázisomban akarj ha én is
szeress ha én is legyél ha mégis nő férfi hogy én
is így vagyok az aki ő volt és te az vagy aki a te őd
volt egyek a múltban ami megy el mint a felhő
szerepet cserél és felnőtt hozzánk a világot

Na zdravi

Jayde Will

I once met Hrabal
 in the train from Olomouc
 to Prague
 he must have been
 coming from work
 in a dirty factory
 or a village where
 time stood still
 his bright eyes
 exuded curiosity
 we talked about
 potato dumplings
 beer
 and girls
 as we stepped off
 into the throng
 he smiled
 tipped his hat
 and went on his way
 probably to
 The Golden Tiger
 and then home
 to Eliška

*

we boarded the train
 for Pepsi Sziget
 I followed you
 like a starstruck puppy
 watching every curve
 of your face
 your olive skin
 your wild curly hair
 we talked on that train
 packed with daytime revelers
 going to see Loud Reed sing
 A Perfect Day
 those days happen

*Bio note:* Jayde Will

Jayde Will is a writer and translator working from Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian. Recent translations include Artis Ostups's *Gestures* (Ugly Duckling Press), Eeva Park's *The Rules of Bird Hunting* (Parthian), and Ričardas Gavelis's *Memoirs of a Life Cut Short* (Vagabond Voices). His own writing has appeared in *In Other Words*, *Words Without Borders*, *Disclaimer Magazine*, *Lituanus*, *Satori*, *Punctum*, and *Kultūrziemes*. He lives in Riga.

The Return to Ózd

Jennifer Walker

The cats disappeared the day my grandmother died. I remember them sitting on the porch on a frayed weave mat at the doorstep. She used to let them in at night to sleep in the unheated room with her. In the morning, they would run away under the shade of the overgrown vines hanging from the broken tiles.

Her house was silent after they took her to the hospital, but it wasn't empty. Each cupboard, chest and corner was shoved full of discarded memories. An embroidered ottoman stuffed with rags: my mother's first communion dress, discarded balls of yarn, and half embroidered doilies. The grimy white cupboard in the kitchen overflowing with dried pasta, some packs had sell-by dates a decade old. We kept finding money hidden

around the house. A few hundred Euros tucked inside the painted jar filled with flour, and around 80,000 forints stuck to a plate that swam in spilled honey.

The old house once on the edge of Ózd—a former factory town in north-eastern Hungary—is surrounded by new buildings. A giant blue Tesco sits just across the stream my mother used to bathe in as a child.

Places etch themselves into our memories and identities. I spent my childhood running around my grandmother's garden, set up my first telescope on the rooftop and watched the stars with my grandfather. The rooftop is now rusted and crumbles with holes and the garden overrun with two meter high grass and ticks.

Growing up English and Hungarian,

I was always the “other” in these respective countries: a stateless citizen with two passports. Weekends and holidays in my grandmother's town as a child were the closest I came to having a real connection to a place. It was not a place I chose nor that I was proud of, but it was the place that lasted longest in my life, fixed to my identity whether I wanted it or not. You won't find Ózd in any guidebook. There is no reason to visit this declining, forgotten industrial town in Hungary's poorest region. Non-Hungarians have no idea where to find Ózd on the map; Hungarians say they're sorry when I tell them where my family's from. Poverty is abundant, echoing out from under the rusty shadow of the crumbling steel factory that was once the town's lifeblood. What's left of the mostly demolished factory, that is. “Ózd used to be a nice place,” my mother assures me, “Everyone had work at the factory, we had

restaurants, cafes, concerts. There even was a casino.”

I remember the good times, too: the days the whole family was there. We sat under the vines toasting bacon over an open fire under balmy nights. Sometimes, we worked together to pick fruit from the plum and peach trees scattered about the garden. Everyone was still alive or still around in those days. Now it's just me, my mother, and the unspoken weight of physical and emotional baggage the shape of black bin bags filled with hoarded things.

“I built this house with my bare hands while your grandfather worked at the factory,” my grandmother used to say. I lost track of how often she repeated that same story. Like an old record that couldn't escape a deeply worn groove. I should have taken these stories less for granted: they were a part of my own history just as they were hers.

My grandmother forgot things. She would ask me what day of the week it was, before accusing me or my mother of stealing her pension or the ID card she had misplaced. After she died, we found it stuck inside a thin leather wallet pressed like dried flowers beneath the heavy weight of a pickle jar. Another was hidden inside a deck of tarot cards she kept by her bed.

She had read from her deck the day she fell. My mother found it spread out beside her bed. My grandmother read her tarot cards every day and interpreted them





Photo by Eszter Fruzsiná

literally. If she pulled death or the hanged man, she didn't leave the house. This day she pulled the lovers and three of cups. It had been 40 degrees and she fell in the garden. The ambulance took her to the local hospital, where there were only two doctors to cover the wards. One of them was on holiday. She died two weeks later.

"If anything happens to me, make sure I don't ever end up in Ózd Hospital," my mother begged as we collapsed from exhaustion after we cleared my grandmother's hoarded possessions, packed into 40 black sacks into the dusty yard.

We returned on the first of November to lay flowers at her grave and light three candles: one for my grandmother, one for my grandfather who died two decades ago, and one for my aunt who overdosed on tranquilizers. Tealights illuminated the cemetery, and the perfume of freshly cut lilies floated on the air. The wind rustled the silk flowers we brought with us.

"It would look horrible in a few days if we got fresh flowers," my mother said. "At least silk endures."

The graveyard grows each year. Wooden crosses line the top of the hill for those who died without the money for a proper marker. It's a section that keeps growing. Next to my grandmother's grave, there is an unnamed wooden cross. I almost tripped over it. The ivy had already got its tendrils hooked into the curvature of the wood.

"A lot of people committed suicide when the factory closed," my mother said as we crunched over the gravel and glanced at tombstones belonging to men who died in their 30s and 40s, "Many people didn't have the money or the opportunity to move away."

My mother had been given the chance to leave though. She had married an Englishman and moved abroad for 40 years. It was my idea to return to Hungary, to find the roots that I had never had.

When I was with the English, I felt like an outsider. Theresa May's "If you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere," cut too close to the bone. The anti-Eastern European climate leading up to Brexit had culminated in my father mirroring these views one awkward car drive from Gatwick airport.

However, once in Hungary, I was someone who couldn't speak Hungarian properly, someone with a foreign name. Someone who didn't get cast in the school play when I was ten, because I didn't "look Hungarian enough" with my Celtic freckles.

Identity isn't a nationality. It doesn't hold a passport, but it has a family. My grandmother's past is part of my present. Her stories passed through generations to become mine, like the grey eyes she passed to my mother, and my mother passed to me.

Some of her stories will forever remain a mystery, wrapped up in trash bags, sitting in the yard waiting to be discarded: my mother's baby clothes, Slovak paintings in black wooden frames with mildew on the back of their canvas, crumpled Soviet rubles, my aunt's notes from medical school. The rags the cats slept on.

But the stories that mattered will travel with me. Like the time she was shot by a secret service officer who thought she was a spy (the only spying she did was on my grandfather), or the time she was engaged to a baron's son (the baron was the one in love with her). Even though we packed up the house, threw out or wrapped up what was left, her life would remain inside of me. Even after the house was sold. Even after the cats stopped coming back.

Bio note: Jennifer Walker



After Jennifer got her PhD in nuclear physics, she decided to leave science behind and has since built up a career as a writer. She's lived and worked in different countries, in the UK, Hungary, Spain, Germany, Georgia, and India, she currently lives in Budapest but also spent a lot of time in Vienna researching a guidebook that's coming out in May. She works as a copywriter by day, a travel writer by night, and a fiction writer early in the morning. She comes from a mixed Hungarian-British family background, which means she often has an identity crisis about what place she can call home.

Aquarium

Translations of János Pilinszky
by Dániel Dányi

Inside the aquarium, my sister
takes cover behind the weeds.

Night and day, we leave no stone unturned,
her aunts, children, grandchild,
in search of her through all the slimy weird
leaf-tangled graves and cemeteries.

She's huddled on her bed. Debris.

Trembling. Waking. Astir.

Lighting up. Speaking. To us. To none.

Just like a birdfish,

flapping, wringing fins:

trembling and pulsing. Birdfish eyes

not looking to meet ours, just

punching holes. Anywhere, so long as

it's holes, through anyone and anything,

against us, against me, against herself,

a hole, or bust.

Photo by Wayne Brett

Akvárium

Nővérem az akváriumban

behuzódik a moszatok közé.

Éjjel-nappal keressük, hol van,

nénéi, gyerekei, unokája

keressük a nyálkás és idegen

lomb-levél sírban-temetőben.

Ágyán kuporog. Törmelék.

Remeg. Fölbred. Fölrriad.

Rágyújt. Beszél. Hozzánk szól. Senkihez.

Ahogy egy halmadár

uszonyait verdesi, tördeli:

remeg és lüktet. Halmadár szeme

nem a szemünket keresgéli, csak

lukakat fúr. Nem számít, hogy hova,

csak luk legyen, bárkiben, bármiben,

ellenünk, ellenem, maga ellen,

luk, bármi áron.

I do believe

I do believe I love you,
 crying with my eyes closed for your life.
 But notice how the gods,
 the dust, and even time,
 go raise such heavy dunes
 between you and myself,
 that I am gripped
 by love's vertigo and
 small-minded anxiety.
 Those times I lie in bed afraid,
 like mother nature in the dead of night,
 with not a sound or indication.
 Afterward,
 I'll believe that we belong again,
 once I've put my hand in yours.

Illustration by Ariella Pinter

Azt hiszem

Azt hiszem, hogy szeretlek;
 lehúnyt szemmel sírok azon, hogy élsz.
 De láthatod, az istenek,
 a por, meg az idő
 mégis oly súlyos buckákat emel
 közéd-közém,
 hogy olykor elfog a
 szeretet tériszonya és
 kicsinyes aggodalma.
 Ilyenkor ágyba bújva félek,
 mint a természet éjfél idején,
 hangtalanúl és jelzés nélkül.
 Azután
 újra hiszem, hogy összetartozunk,
 hogy kezemet kezédbe tettem.

How Lopsided

How lopsided these feelings that surround us,
How manifold the different attractions,
Though we're falling like a rock,
straight and unambiguous.

What multitudes of shame and fancied glory
this net we stumbled, tangled in, while
we ought to be airing in the sun
all things held to be clandestine.

And how
long the lag before we understand
that our dim eyes allow a better view
than lamplight, and how late too
we are to notice the world
continually falling on its knees.

Milyen felemás

Milyen felemás érzések közt élünk,
milyen sokféle vonzások között,
pedig zuhanunk, mint a kő
egyenesen és egyértelműen.

Hányféle szégyen és képzelt dicsőség
hálójában evickélünk, pedig
napra kellene teregetnünk
mindazt, mi rejteni való.

Milyen
megkésve értjük meg, hogy a
szemek homálya pontosabb lehet
a lámpafénynél, és milyen
későn látjuk meg a világ
örökös térdre roskadását.

Straight Maze

How will it feel then, on that return flight,
described to us in all but similes,
in things like an altar, holy of holies,
holding hands, a reunion, an embrace,
a lawn under the boughs, a table laid,
no first or last attending guest to speak of,
just what will it be like there in the end,
in this ascending fall of open wings,
in dipping back toward the flaming focus
of our home nest? I really cannot know,
and yet, if there is one thing I do know,
then this is it, this sultry corridor,
a straight maze like an arrow, into which
we find so densely packed, and denser still,
the liberty of our actual flight.

Egyenes labirintus

Milyen lesz az a visszaröpülés,
amiről csak hasonlatok beszélnek,
olyanfélék, hogy oltár, szentély,
kézfogás, visszatérés, ölelés,
fűben, fák alatt megterített asztal,
hol nincs első és nincs utolsó vendég,
végül is milyen lesz, milyen lesz
e nyitott szárnyú emelkedő zuhanás,
visszahullás a fókusz lángoló
közös fészkébe? - nem tudom,
és mégis, hogyha valamit tudok,
hát ezt tudom, e forró folyosót,
e nyílegyenes labirintust, melyben
mind tömöttebb és mind tömöttebb
és egyre szabadabb a tény, hogy röptünk.



Bio note: Dániel Dányi



Dániel Dányi is a Hungarian literary translator. He was born in 1980 in Budapest, and currently living in Burgas, Bulgaria. His literary translations have been published at *Pilvax Magazine*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, on *Hungarian Literature Online* and elsewhere online.

Defense Speech Seven

Translations of István László G.
by Dániel Dányi

You may well find the idiot in me, one that I am if need be, and two more who the first idiot oversees, and one more to oversee idiot number one. Our holy foursome is divine. Hell can seem no brighter. Go on, ask us something. Guess which one of us replied. The two idiots overseen by one just might give more reassuring answers that justify who you are. The idiot who oversees two more, and overseen by one might undermine, if not your sense of sanity, that job is for the idiot overseeing two more; but confuse you just for the hell of it, idiocy aside. But this one's all resentful accusations, even when every word of the reply absolutely drips honey, it's a putdown. Listen and ask. All present have their clever eyes on you.



Illustration by Sandor Sipos



Illustration by Sandor Sipos

Hetedik védőbeszéd

Megtálhatod bennem a hülyét, mert az vagyok, ha kell, és két másikat, akit ez a hülye felügyel, meg egyet, aki a hülyét felügyeli. Szent négyesünk egészen édeni. A pokol se nézhet ki szebben. Kérdezz csak valamit. És jöjj rá, melyikünk válaszol. A két hülye, akit egy hülye felügyel, talán megnyugtatóbb választ fog adni, megerősít téged abban, ami vagy. A hülye, aki két hülyét felügyel és egy hülye felügyeli, elbizonytalanít, na nem abban, hogy te is hülye vagy, arra ott van az, aki a két hülyét felügyelő hülyét felügyeli, inkább csak úgy, hülyeségtől függetlenül leszel bizonytalan. De ez meg leteremt és vádol, még akkor is, ha minden szava a válasznak csupa méz, még akkor is megaláz. Figyelj és kérdezz. Itt mindenki okosan csak téged néz.

Defense Speech Seventy-three

My father died while giving his defense speech.
 The fact's an accusation in itself. But it appears
 the hearing had begun even before any charge
 was brought. Now for a posthumous defense?
 When I'm dead, before eternity begins (how long
 before's your guess) as the speech is underway
 my eternal father is born, I've no time left for
 defense. Before? Is there no God before? Thus
 my father's death only balances
 the scales. Ever the balancing act, death.
 With beats on the ones. Am I the one now?
 Having grown terminally old with it. Of course,
 who called who old's debatable. I never called
 my father that, like he did his old man—I'm
 called that by my unborn child, who isn't.
 Too old for an unborn child, no doubt. Too old
 for those born into life. The catch of being
 forty. Defense failed once again, despite its
 overall victory. That's what I got for
 confusing what comes to pass and what's brought
 to an end. An irreparable crime. The hearing
 has brought me past myself.



Photo by Borsos Zoltán

Hetvenharmadikdőbeszéd

A védőbeszéd elmondása közben meghalt
 az apám. Ez már önmagában is vád. De mintha
 a tárgyalás korábban kezdődött volna, hogy a
 vád elhangzott. Így most utólag védekezni?
 Halálom után az örökélet megkezdése előtt
 (na, mennyivel?) a vádbeszédek közben megszülethet
 az örökéletre nemzöm. Hogy ne legyen időm se
 védekezni. Addig? Addig nincsen Isten? Ezért
 egyensúly dolga csak, hogy most meghalt
 az apám. A halál mindig egyensúly dolga.
 Súly van az egyen. És ez az egy én vagyok?
 Ebbe végérvényesen beleöregedtem. De persze
 kérdés, ki kit hívott öregnek itt. Én apámat
 soha, ő az apját többnyire – engem a nem
 létező gyerekek akkor is öregnek hív, ha nincs.
 Egy nemlétező gyerekek mindenképp öreg vagyok. Öreg
 vagyok egy létezőnek is. Ez a bökkenő. Erről szól
 a negyven. Szóval a védelem itt csődöt mond,
 még ha mindent megnyer is. Ez lett abból,
 hogy a múlandóságot összetévesztettem a
 mulaszthatósággal. Véték, menthetetlen. A tárgyalás
 mulaszt el önmagamtól.

Birds and Traffic

Tom Bass

To make the observations that follow, I made myself stop. Hobbies of fiction and documentary were put to bed. Adventure and abandon were disciplined with caution and planning. Journals were tossed away. Extremes were suppressed by a cute regard for life. But during this Om of creative forgetting, I unearthed a new thrust to my understanding.

Within my orbit, an hour by bike from home, I had found sacred ground.

"I've been to the secret spot," I'd mumble to anyone who might care.

The spot was unexceptional, a few meters of Danube beach with no extraordinary characteristics. Here, I meditated with the soul winds that coiled down from the hills and prayed to the river for great days. It was no accident that this temple needed no more decoration than water's being and movement. Plain and featureless, it was a slate to jot my thoughts huffing after me to the cove.

I dropped to my knees, praying

in the silence to the sacred eternal spirit who inhabited the place. Studying the shallows more intently than ever before, I could discern many spongy blobs floating merrily along. Yes, in the midst of the umber waters, in a space transcending place, spirit and time, and where my focus and logic rested, swam aerated colonies of poo.

I laughed aloud and said, "My heavens, it's not the secret spot. Or the sacred spot. No, it's the shit sacred secret spot!"

I loved the mockery it made of my temple and wryly smiled at the cosmic joke.

With my hands dug in the shingle beach, holding asanas and making the world upside down and inside out, with the earth's energy surging into my shoulders and soaring out of my hips, I wrote an alphabet of poses in the dirty, gritty sand, home of thousands of oxygenated turds interred among the pebbles that had advertised themselves as a beach. I smarted again at the irony and stared at the river, absorbing its presence and

safety, force and vulnerability, its absolutes.

I watched the fabric of the water and listened to the thoughts that bubbled from underneath the surface; soon I would set out for home with wheels as wings and join the traffic. But I knew I would return, chasing silence, exactly so I could sing.

which we live? The connection felt temporary like a prayer, cathartic like a pilgrimage, tentative like a wish to never grow old. The link was never as obvious as picking off flying morsels during hunting season. Yet I had to acknowledge my perspective was imbued with manifest destiny, an



How did I land on birds and traffic as threads with which to stitch this story together, motors to drive this report on the epoch in

androcentric view that so long as the birds filled the skies with their songs, our future was livable, flimsy succor that

Photo by Eszter Fruzsin

I ought to live to the end of my days. I was aghast at uncovering mortality beating in the heart of my thoughts.

I brushed it off around the time a colleague warned me about parenthood.

“Since giving birth, I can only think about death,” she said, blinking at me like a pit bull. She scratched her orange face and emphasized, “All the time.”

I was in denial then, but she was right. Coinciding with the birth of my first child, I began to see death everywhere as I completed my errands in the markets and squares of the congested, panicked city. I had zero illusions about traffic, a plague inhabiting every pocket of the earth, a mob of deathly vehicles that I suspected of the utmost malice. The prospect of death at their hands made me wary, but not enough to stop the pedals of life turning.

I would carry on until some horrible *fait accompli* might snuff me out, an unknown afternoon when risk would sweep me away like a black puck. I kicked from surface to surface, held aloft by a language of balance, stays and tension. I rode free of ear buds, no sound-

tracking other than my body tearing through tense suburban streets. I hurried to my refuge, the swooping bands of the Danube, its huddling trees and undulating tunnels of plants, as I repeated my tactile loop into the electric natural world.

My headquarters were within earshot of Budapest's bleakest railway station that deals in the crudest, abject extremes of emotion, opportunity and temperature. Beyond the human cataract of the train station's limits, and between my own adventures, I found love, comfort and shelter that convinced me to settle along the boundary of East and West. I never suspected where my uncanny preoccupation about birds and traffic would lead: to the not so far yet distant Danube. Serendipity or *déjà vu*, I still hadn't grasped the weight of what I'd stumbled across on that spring afternoon by the river after twenty years of ignoring sewage.

Reality was conditioned to be more mundane.

I liked to think I played by my own rules, doing things like smuggling foodie contraband across borders or claiming an object of uncertain provenance

at the weekend flea market. This act of purchase, for instance, repeated billions of times a day in malls and markets across the globe, made me happy. It made me forget about unhappiness, and by extension death. My death and the death of everyone around me. Spending money made my life relevant, and these objects were things that I could love and that lent my life



Photo by Eszter Fruzshia

meaning. Anyone who could afford to do likewise was in cahoots with the prospect of death. The weekly patrol of Budapest farmers' markets added to the illusion that I was an individual who could make choices and express agency. I believed my unique choices improved my cool factor and made me important and immortal.

But I could no longer suppress an acute fear of death. I grappled with understanding how my position had shifted. This primordial fear had agitated to the surface and began to motivate my every action and idea. This frame of mind amplified by the baby, I became prone to hanging my head over the kitchen sink, tears dribbling down my cheeks while dinner simmered in the background. Much later, when I anticipated my next child, I steeled myself against the waves of crying. And the tears didn't come. I would cope with whomever might drift down from the universe to live with us. I'd accepted that creation was a risky game.

I had arrived at birds and traffic while honoring a lifelong physical fitness strategy that followed a reliable pattern: strike out for a quick classic, in this case up to Újpest and over Megyeri bridge to the Danube's back roads that culminate in the old extremities of the Ottoman Empire. These passages of asphalt, grass, sand, leaves, rock and mud would allow me to forget.

Behind me spilled a wake of horns, motors and sneers that faded as I bicycled on. My

anxiety dissipated the harder I pedaled, my mind peeling open like the path before me, back to a time when I was unaware of who I was or what I was made of. The call of the birds, their very presence outside my home, reassured me about our future. A society of songs meant intelligence of a higher order, capable of defining territory and behavior, yet sharing the land and air. But make no mistake: the birds will sink before us, asphyxiating in the dust, as desiccated as leaves. Then we'll know our time has come.

I had no idea how the end would play out. I made no extra preparation other than to make chutneys, pickles and jams as therapy. The shocking thing was that I had resolved so readily to act. Critical distance accumulated in my legs as I sucked down lungfuls of soul for breath; by riding I ditched the consumer choices and could escape the grip of a new age of Medievalism. The answer was only too apparent in the river's mirror-green surface: we were the aliens, and our science fiction of Mars was Earth in the near future. I found it refreshing to acknowledge that death inspired everything and everyone around us and that

only active forgetting would permit us to stay sane enough to communicate. I fantasized about developing the idea that death was driving commerce, how I might rebrand death, expose it to the light, make it cool again.

One summer evening, after observing a pair of herons glide across the square's airspace, I calculated how much oomph I had left. Based on my historical average, I tallied that I had 2,000 rides remaining in my



Photo by Eszter Pruzsina

lifetime. Barring questions of whether or not I'd jinxed myself with my thoughts of eternity, I could make at least one 50-kilometer route a week for the next 40 years, accounting for winters, children and physical depreciation. This excluded errands and commutes and

thrashing around the city.

Meanwhile I discovered the herons were opportunists. They'd learned to deplane at the city zoo at their own secret spot for tidbits of food before returning to their redoubt a rookery at the southern border of Budapest. I'd found their nests after pursuing them by bike, their nests as high as Csepel bridge that flowed with caravans of international goods circulating from Eurasia.

I trusted my powers of observation, and I might have followed the zeitgeist: strip a retail space to its bricks and beams, install a bar along one wall and broad tables, offer a

concise range of coffee, drinks, music, fast wi-fi: the basis for the birth of a miniature well-intentioned cloud of ideas. But one more indie bar wouldn't save the day. No, I could chart up more watts for posterity, an aerodynamic bubble where I could question the status quo, reorganize my plans and solve whatever challenges were placed before me.

That evening my daughter joined me on the balcony; she listened to the libretto of blackbirds singing in the square and me whistling replies to their songs, the river chortling through the inevitable reverb of traffic: my spot calling me.

Bio note: Tom Bass



Tom Bass's stories have been published in *Versal*, *Bordercrossing*, *Pilvax* and other European journals. A graduate of the University of Texas, Central European University, Bath Spa University and Balassi Institute, he once worked in the fields of democracy building and minority rights in Hungary and the region. He recently released *Roots to Fruits*, a documentary on Highlife and Afrofunk in Ghana. His creative, editorial and film work can be found at redhandagency.com.

“I am surprised where the story is taking me”

It's hard to name an artistic field in which Istvan Orosz is not hard at work. He is a visual artist, a printmaker, an animator and film director, a graphic designer and, since relatively recently, a writer. He has become famous in Hungary and abroad. His solo exhibitions take place all over the world—from Turkey to Russia. He is the winner of numerous awards, although he insists that accolades are unimportant.

Orosz published his debut novel *The Ambassador and the Pharaoh* (A követ és a fáraó) in 2011, and his most recent novel *Sakkparti a szigeten* (Chess on the Island) in 2015. Since then *Chess on the Island* has been translated into Russian, and is now being translated into Slovakian and Italian.

This issue of *Panel* includes an exclusive English translation of a chapter of that book and, seizing a rare opportunity, Masha Kamenetskaya met with Istvan Orosz—and asked him how an artist became a writer.

The subject that you've chosen for your book is very specific. The core of the story is a chess match, played by Vladimir Lenin and—a bit less famous figure—Alexander Bogdanov, while they were on the island of Capri, visiting another important person of the time—the Soviet writer Maxim Gorky. Why did you choose this as the subject of your novel?

It all started with a photograph. As a visual artist, I am interested in finding rare or unusual, or otherwise interesting images. I am very much into optical illusions, too. And once, more or less accidentally, I came across a photograph of the chess match between Lenin and Bogdanov. But it was not just a picture. It was itself an optical illusion. You see, during the Soviet era several versions of the same picture existed: the number of the

people depicted in the photograph was different. Usually, those who became unwelcome in their own countries, were just erased, wiped off. For instance, there are versions of the photograph with just five people, instead of nine. This illusion inspired me.

Plus, I like playing chess. Soon after I found the photo, I also found the scheme of the chess tournament and made an animated film, a move-by-move reconstruction of that competition. And it was only after all that I started working on a book.

It seems like you managed to tap into such a rich vein of material in your book. How did you manage to dig all this stuff up?

Well, one thing led to another. At first, I read works of Lenin, and of Gorky, translated into Hungarian.

I continued my research, digging through documents in English and even a bit in Russian. I was lucky to meet a translator, Vyatcheslav Sereda. He helped me a lot with the research, and even corrected some inaccuracies when, later on, he was translating my book into Russian. So, it it was just one of those things that happened over time.

To be honest, I was unsure of how to treat your book—it seems so documentary, but something about it, the narrator, for instance, gives the reader a sense of its fictional nature.

I would say it is semi-documentary and semi-fiction. It is definitely more than a collection of facts, more than pure documentary research. I worked with real people and with credible facts, but the way I worked with them, lets say that I wrote a kind of “documentary legend”. I observed and researched the details and stories behind the facts in a primarily “fictionalized” way. When I begin to make my own interpretations, the result is fiction.

I'll give you several examples.

One of the characters in the book is a parrot who was brought to Italy from the USA. This is a fact. But the story around the parrot—what it said, how people treated it—is made up.

Or, there is a mention of the Hungarian artist Tivadar Csontváry Koszta, who is know to have lived on the island of Capri at the same time Gorky did, and when Lenin

visited. It's a fact that Csontváry could speak Slovakian. Those things together gave me the push I needed to imagine what it would be like if Csontváry and these guys actually met.

Or, there is another picture in the book from the same chess tournament in which Lenin was either yawning or screaming. Nobody knows for sure what he was doing. My interpretation was that he was yawning, because it added a nice, peculiar detail to the story and provided additional meaning. Symbolic meaning, I'd say. Because Lenin was losing the tournament, and he wanted to show that it was somehow unimportant to him. Plus, there was another competition going on beneath the chess.

So what came first for you—the characters or the chess?

Chess came first. And then I was very impressed with the



Illustration by Istvan Orosz



personality of Alexander Bogdanov. Such an interesting figure! Almost unknown, in Hungary at least. In 1908, though, he was almost as strong and significant a political figure as Lenin, and they were basically competing over who would become the leader of the Bolshevik party.

They were really different.

Bogdanov was a well-educated man, a doctor, a high-class scientist who was working in the field of blood transfusion. The blood transfusion institute in Yekaterinburg, in the Urals, holds his, Bogdanov's, name. He also wrote the first Russian science fiction book called *The Red Planet*, about Mars, in which there is a part about blood transfusion.

Lenin and Bogdanov were rivals and friends at the same time they were involved in a complicated relationship that became the center of my book. Let's just say, that while Lenin and Bogdanov were competing for the leadership, Lenin was simultaneously hoping that Bogdanov would help him to cure his syphilis with a blood transfusion.

What do you find in chess that inspires you?

The chess is a symbolic game in a way. It can be seen as politics set on a game board, as we see in my book. As an artist, as a graphic designer, I use a lot of mathematics and geometry, and I find there to be amazing geometry in chess.

One of the things you work with as an artist is anamorphosis (a **distorted image that can be seen as a whole only from a certain angle or through glass—M.K.**). Might we say that the same principle can be applied to you as a storyteller?

There are similarities. I give different points of view in the book, and the narrator sometimes speaks directly to the reader, and sometimes disappears completely. This is how I tried to create a multilayered story. There is always a hidden meaning within my drawings, in my visual subjects. I want to have that in my writing, too—something to be discovered beneath the first layer of story.

If you were to compare your emotional state when you draw and when you write, would you say they are different?

I would like to write how I draw.

What do you mean?

I am not a professional writer, but I am a professional artist. Since I've been working as an artist for a long time now, when I draw I pretty much know where I will arrive at in the end. And when I write, I have a lot of surprises along the way. To be honest, I didn't expect that. It turned out that the story builds itself up along the way, and I was surprised at where the story was taking me. It's irrational, and I didn't know that it would be like that.

These are different approaches to writing. Some writers know what



Illustration by Istvan Orosz

will happen at the end of their story when they start writing, others, like you said, don't know and don't want to know. I wonder, though, how you divide your day. How do you manage to find the time to work in all these artistic fields?

That's hard to answer. For a long time I worked as an artist, and, until recently, I've been trying to work more on my writing, and reading, too. I am not a tightly scheduled person, I basically don't know what I will do tomorrow, and I tend to jump from one thing to another. For instance, this morning I was working on my third novel.

What will it be about?

This will be a story that follows several generations of a family in Hungary. It starts in

the 1950s and continues up to the present day. It will be fiction but will also include a lot of documents and research.

Who inspires you?

Borges, Umberto Eco, Nabokov, Antal Szerb. In my visual works I consider myself to be close to MC Escher.

You once said the poster as it is is "an attack upon the eye." Why so?

In the 1980s I was thinking about a pseudonym and my friend suggested Utisz, an ancient Greek name meaning Nobody. This was the name that Odysseus used when he blinded the Cyclops. It happened at a time when I worked with theater companies and made posters for performances. So, basically, the phrase was a reference to my new pseudonym. Although, I do find posters to be something very obvious and, hence, an attack.

Your posters were printed in color, while in your artistic works you prefer black and white. Why are you so cautious in your use of color?

I have many answers, and here is one of them. When

I started to work in an applied art field, it was very expensive to publish in color (as it is now), so, basically, I was forced to use black and white and got into the habit of it.

Another quotation of yours is: "Can I draw what I can't imagine?" Have you ever found an answer to that question?

Sometimes I actually can draw without thinking about what I am doing. Or, sometimes, it works out as something different than it was in my head. It works nicely when I am speaking on the phone and drawing at the same time—interesting objects appear. But this phrase should be treated as a kind of paradox, and I like paradoxes.



Book reviews



Losing Venice

a novel by Scott Stavrou, ROGUE DOG PRESS, 2018.
Reviewed by Timea Klincsek

Losing Venice, the engaging new novel by Greek-American writer Scott Stavrou, evocatively describes the life of an itinerant professional who questions, self-reflects, and, finally, reinvents himself in his quest for a sense of belonging. Stavrou has written

fiction and non-fiction for numerous publications in the United States and Europe. His short piece “Across the Suburbs and Into the Express Lane” received the PEN America International Hemingway Writing Award in 2000. He is also the author of such works as the travel book *Wasted Away*, as well as three original screenplays, including *Picketing with Prometheus*.

In *Losing Venice*, Stavrou takes the reader for an intimate stroll across some of the key European cities he lived or worked in: starting in romantic Venetian piazzas and canals, through the medieval, cobblestoned streets of Prague, stopping in proud, divided Budapest, and arriving, finally, at the stunning, rocky, Greek island of Hydra. He describes each city and town with an intensity and vividness that makes them come alive, pulling the reader into the story alongside the protagonist on his extraordinary journey.

Set in the early 21st century, during the Bush presidency, and just after the September 11th attacks, the novel tells the story of Mark Vandermar, a single man in his thirties, haunted by poor decisions in his love life back in San Francisco, who has since been transferred in order to continue his career as a travel marketing professional in Venice. While his Venetian boss is clearly pleased with his performance, Mark feels lonely and detached, isolated from the outside world. As he searches for meaning, he forges an enduring friendship with a local, and falls in love with a chestnut-haired artist whose name he does not know. After her disappearance, Mark falls back into his old routine: the “Campari Clock”, which consists mostly of day-drinking and daydreaming. Mark’s malaise is soon interrupted by a business-trip to Prague, where he becomes involved in a series of complex affairs with long-reaching implications.

Losing Venice is a clever, witty, and touching. Its characters vivid and relatable, sprinkled with humor and self-irony, it unfolds in first person as told by its protagonist.

It’s a recommended read, especially for those trained expats who have experienced the sensation of being lost, only to be found again. The novel conveys a message about the importance of appreciating the small things: a reminder to find magic in everyday life. It also provides ‘guidance’ on how to make sense of an increasingly complex world, and exhorts readers to resist the temptation to become disenchanted, even, jaded. Most of all, *Losing Venice* is possessed of a strong narrative voice written in rich, picturesque language.



Concert at a Railway Station. Selected Poems.

Osip Mandelstam. Translated from Russian by Alistair Noon. Shearsman Books, 2018.
Reviewed by Masha Kamenetskaya

Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938) is one of the most influential Russian poets of the 20th century. His achievements, both personal and artistic, demand an in-depth explanation, and have outlived him

considerably (he was killed in a Gulag at just 47).

According to his contemporaries, he was a man disinterested in worldly possessions and the comforts of a permanent home. He never accrued either—with his wife Nadezhda, he left flats and changed cities, voluntarily or under considerable strain, and with only the books they could carry. This sounds romantic, yet it was anything but.

Mandelstam’s case was a brutal example of era (the echo of which can still be heard), in which even a poet—a bit too independent and educated for his own good and, thus, an irritation to the state—could be effortlessly imprisoned, destroyed, and vanished from all official literature for years. His case is also an illustration of what happens when a poet, a natural-born free spirit, tries to face down the forces of evil within his country (note: such confrontations rarely end favorably for the poet). Yet, the life and poetry of Mandelstam, above all, shows us that tyrants die but literature remains.

Selected Poems, translated by Alistair Noon, spans the whole of Mandelstam’s writing career and includes those poems that simultaneously sealed his fate and won him his immortality. The poem “We live, but feel no land at our feet”, or “The Stalin Epigram” as it is also known, is not only a remarkable piece, but represented a turning point in Mandelstam’s life, after which he was arrested for the first time and exiled to the Urals.

The poem “It knows me, this city I’d walk till I cried”, which is dedicated to Leningrad and continues to be cherished by the people of Leningrad/St. Petersburg, paints an artistically intense and affectionate, if slightly sentimental, portrait of the city in which he lived what may have spent the best years of his life.

The pieces from *Voronezh Notebooks*, also included in the book, survived the Stalin era mostly because friends and supporters hid and/or memorized his manuscripts. The tyrant died, but the poetry didn’t.

Both the selection of these poems and the collection’s title are of the translator’s careful choosing. The book gives us a detailed view of Mandelstam’s legacy; Noon uses Mandelstam’s original texts and titles, along with censored and edited versions (with additional title variants being placed in square brackets). The translator worked off the 2009 *Russian edition of Mandelstam’s collected works (compiled by A.G. Mets)* which is reputed to be the most complete and most accurate.

Mind the Details

This issue of Panel features the works of visual art that made the short list of the art contest that we held in collaboration with Painters Palace, Vad Art, and Jancsó Art Gallery. The runners-up and the winners had their work exhibited in the Jancsó Art Gallery (Budapest, Kazinczy utca, 30), and have been highlighted in the magazine you are reading now. It was no easy task to choose the winners, as we had an impressive selection of artwork among our submissions.

You can find all the information about the artists who contributed to this issue on the back pages, and here we are happy and proud to introduce our main winners—Lyudmila Martynova, Sándor Sipos, and Gergő Bánkúti.

The painting *One Afternoon in July* is our cover image. Its author Lyudmila Martynova originally comes from Ukraine and is an architect. Back in Ukraine, Lyudmila won several art contests. While living in Europe, she has participated in group exhibitions, and her watercolor series were turned into prints for the bag line of the brand *Zierpuppe* (Ukraine). Here in Budapest, where Lyudmila (or Mila) has been living with her family for almost 10 years, she works in an architecture firm and simultaneously pursues her career as a visual artist. Mila admits that being an artist and an architect at the same time enriches her perspective and her toolbox in both fields. She works in various techniques—graphics, watercolor, oil painting, collage, and what she enjoys most about the process is capturing those tiny moments that come and go, but yet leave something behind for us to remember and reflect on. "You can't see the whole picture without looking at the details," Lyudmila says.



The works of Sándor Sipos emerge from the point where the physical world meets cyberspace. When facing each other, these forces have to interact. And they somehow succeed, thanks to Sipos, whose artistic goal is to create his own dimension, a symbiosis of cyber, artistic and physical material. Sándor Sipos, a Hungarian born in Romania and who lives in Montreal,

works as a painter and as a multimedia artist, and whatever he takes in his hands, it becomes multilayered, meta-visual, and shows “near invisibility.” He explores desire, chaos, a moment of time and something else in-between, that, if properly mixed and spiced, turns to harmony. Sándor Sipos took part in a number of group and solo exhibitions in Hungary, Romania, Italy, Canada. His work *Revisiting Freud* is featured in this Panel.

Gergő Bánkúti provided his contest submission with the following note: “Under the new rule, homelessness is forbidden, meaning that one cannot live on the streets permanently. Those who break the rule, can be sentenced to community service or even be imprisoned.” His series *Shadows* that is published as a solid project, though split into seven images, reflects on this topic. A young Hungarian artist with ink and pencil, he captures what it is like when the street is your only home, and it's being taken away.



Gergő's favorite themes are memories, remembrance, inheritance, connections with previous generations, with those who are gone. He also makes installations and sculptures out of family things, found and brought from artist's home village, texts and visual images. Gergő Bánkúti is a graduate of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, a regular participant of the exhibitions and artistic residencies.

We hope you will enjoy their works as much as we do.



Photo by Gergő Bánkúti



Photo by Gergő Bánkúti

Contributors

Alberts Bels
 Tom Bass
 Gabi Csutak
 Dániel Dányi
 Gabor Gyukics
 Timea Klincsek
 Anna Leah
 Patrick Mallowney
 Ildiko Nagy
 Zsuka Nagy
 István Orosz
 Jayde Will

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If you are a publisher, an author, a cultural manager, a book shop owner and have an idea to discuss, don't hesitate to get in touch.

Email for inquiries – panel.editors@gmail.com

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Artists of Panel

Zoltán Borsos

In his work he is trying to tie together traditional visual storytelling, spontaneity and thoughtfulness. Since 2016, he has been using only analog photography techniques as one of the most sensitive and honest forms of photography.

Wayne Brett

Born in London, England. Wayne has lived and worked in Hungary since 2003. He is an actor and writer, who also spends a lot of time creating in the fields of visual art and music. He is most happy when flexing all of his bow strings, combining all the above interests and making film/theatre.

Anissa Casarella

Born in Switzerland, she has lived in the USA, Brazil, South Africa and most European countries including the Netherlands. Currently living in Budapest. Fascinated by the psychology of people, Anissa is trying to define what it means to be a human being by studying interactions, by creating experiences, constantly putting herself in a new cultural context.

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.

Magdolna Laukó

A photographer from Budapest. Her theme: simple things in minimal or paint with long exposure.

Ariella Pintér

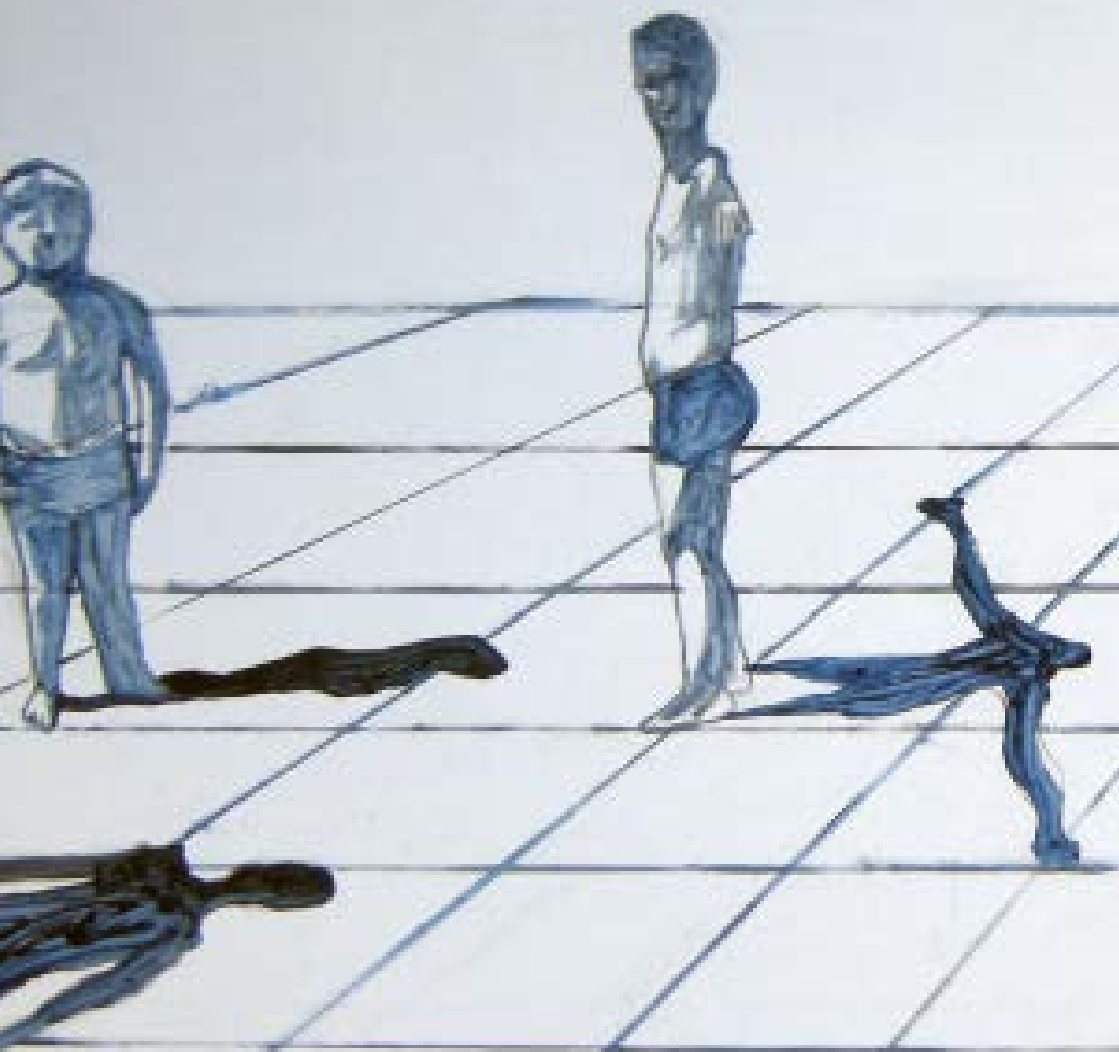
Born in Győr, Hungary. Studied graphic design at Metropolitan University from 2012-2015. Works as a graphic designer at Ericsson Hungary. Living in Budapest for 6 years now. Also loves playing guitar, painting and creating sculptures.

Edwin Alistair D Sellors

Publisher of Ragged Lion Press, London. Father of three. Writer, painter, film maker, musician.

Agnieszka Filipow "Mozzie"

Born in Poland (1981), graduated from Frycz Modrzewski College in Krakow from the department of Fine Art&Design (2009). Since 2011 she is based in Budapest. Her favorite themes and genres: architecture, clouds, surrealism, portraits.



The next issue of Panel will be out in Autumn 2019.

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 our form.

We are looking forward to hearing from you.