



PANEL

February 2023/Issue #10

Contemporary
writing & art
from Central
and Eastern
Europe

*anniversary
edition*

Fiction and non-fiction from Ron F
Berisha, Michael Bird, Peter Newall,
Suzanne Hermanoczki, Ákos Szolcsányi,
Imola Eva Zsitva

Contemporary visual art and photography

Poetry from Paul Jaskunas, Lisa Schantl,
Agnese Rutkevica, Lukasevics, Giancarlo
Castro Salas, Eva Ule

Interviews with former
contributors: where they are now

Reviews of Romani literature

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Impressum

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Editorial note

Dear readers,

Welcome to the winter 2022/2023 issue of Panel, a magazine of literature and arts from Central and Eastern Europe. As you may have noticed, this is our tenth issue. Panel is volunteer run, designed and edited, so there's something validating about having meandered all the way from one issue to ten.

Where once there was a single digit on the spine of our magazine, now there are two. What's so great about having an extra digit? Ask any four-fingered man.

Now, at ten issues, there's a sense of the magazine having become habitual, of having made it. To some extent that's true; thanks to the lively interest of contributors, we have been able to publish strong, emerging and established voices from all around Central and Eastern Europe and beyond. Also, Panel has been the lucky recipient of grants from the Jan Michalski Foundation and the Goethe Institute. It is only now, however, with the accumulated hubris of ten issues, that we can admit: it was touch and go there for a minute.

Panel began as loose conjecture around a graffiti-covered table in a Budapest ruin pub that has since been ground to dust. We cobbled together what would become issue 1 from whatever scraps of credibility we could lay our hands on. We paid for the printing out of our own pockets.

So this is a milestone for us, a lap in a race with no clear beginning or finish, but a lap to be proud of.

For this, our tenth issue, we have new fiction from Albania ("The Talking Calf"), and Romania ("The New Client"), as well as nonfiction prose from Ukraine ("The Last City"), Australia ("Summer Camp '89 Mixtape"), Germany ("Balcony for Rent") and Hungary ("25 Rules of Leading a Noble Life"). We have poetry from the United States, Austria, Latvia, Latgale, Slovenia and Germany. We have beautiful visual artwork. And, in honor of our tenth issue, we've touched base with our former contributors to see how their lives have changed. Hopefully we only sent a few of these good people spiraling into midlife crisis.

It's pretty easy not to publish a magazine. Submissions have to be read. The layout has to be set—and a unique visual style selected. Presumably, at some point a printing press is involved. It gets easier the more you do it, but it's never easy. And no one makes you. Sometimes we go almost half a year without publishing one. I bet you're not publishing one right now.

What I'm getting at here is that there's a reason we keep putting out Panel: it's a good idea. Providing an under-served audience with contemporary voices in a competitive, opaque vocation seems self-evidently good, in fact. If the shoe was on the other foot, we would want to be published in Panel. We would want to read it and to construct hackneyed opinions about what works in it and what doesn't. And it would be impossible to continue to put out Panel without you, our audience, wanting (at least some of) the same. The fact that you're reading this now is proof that our tenuous commonality holds yet true—five years and ten issues after we first hypothesized it would.

We're grateful it does. We're grateful for you.

Thank you for joining us,
 Duncan Robertson, on behalf of the Panel team:
 Masha Kamenetskaya
 Maria Gyarmati
 Jennifer Deborah Walker
 Rachel Velsher



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Photo by Jennifer Deborah Walker



The Talking Calf

Ron F Berisha

based on the life and experiences of Mr. Uran Kostreci

There were fifteen inmates in that cell when old Dhimitraq arrived. Some playing dice, some talking literature and art, some killing fleas or pissing in their personal pots. Two praying; one learning Esperanto.

Dhimitraq's late arrival aroused interest. He had been shipped in from another jail for 'staring angrily' at a portrait of the Great Leader during an interview in the warden's office.

"What are you in for, uncle?" asked the bony men. "What are you doing in the worst prison in Albania?"

His crumpled face gave few signs of life, but his gaze, though wistful, remained intact.

"My calf denounced me," he replied.

"What do you mean 'your calf?'"

"My calf," repeated the old timer. "A calf is a young bullock—"

"We know what it is. It's the denunciation bit we don't understand."

"Well, he did. He was my child, my friend, and he denounced me because I abandoned him."

Dhimitraq had been a dairy farmer before his arrest; a simple man, he had tried hard to be good to his family and community. His family consisted of his loyal wife Vasilika, and the several animals that lived downstairs, in the same two-story house as the humans. Dhimitraq did not discriminate; he loved the animals like he would've loved his children, had the Good God blessed him with some. He cared for them, raised them, washed and fed them, and in return they gave him milk, meat, wool, labor, transportation and love. He loved his donkey, Ramo. He loved his goat, Pezevengi. He loved his cow, Mama Milka, but most of all, he loved his calf, whom he had named Murroi. He was

a beautiful brown calf of Busha pedigree, a very well-known breed in the Balkans. Dhimitraq had seen Murroi come to life: had raised him, educated him, nursed him when he'd suffered from rinderpest. Murroi had grown well proportioned and strong. He worked hard, loved his master, and was very promising with regards to future breeding. Every evening before going to bed, Dhimitraq, like a good father, would go downstairs and caress his animals, one by one: speaking to them for a few minutes, before bidding them a warm, sweet goodnight.

Dhimitraq cared little for wars, politics, governments. Had seen many of them come, and many of them go.

But then, in 1946, something happened that had never happened before: collectivization.

Men and women in uniform, with five-pointed stars on their hats and shoulders, turned up and tried to explain agrarian reform to Dhimitraq; the fairness and the benefits of it, the sacrifices needed for it to succeed, the time required for it to bear fruit, real fruit, and so on. Dhimitraq did not understand them very well—especially what they said about benefits—but he was all for it. He felt sure that the people in power knew what they were doing. They were, after all, liberators. They had liberated people from the evils of oppression, and now they were liberating animals, giving them the chance to fulfill their true potential.

The matter became more complex when they asked Dhimitraq to give up Murroi. "It is like asking a father," he said, "to give up his son."

The regional commissar had a rejoinder already prepared. "How many fathers," he asked, "gave up their sons and daughters during the War of National Liberation, sacrificing them at the altar of the cause? I can tell you exactly. Twenty-eight thousand." Dhimitraq reflected awhile on the number and the word 'sacrifice.' He could not find the words he needed to dissuade a good and learned man like the commissar. Still, surrendering Murroi seemed . . . beyond the realm of possibility.

"Couldn't you take me instead?" he pleaded. "I can work hard, like a horse. I will pull the plough cart myself, if need be."

"You will have that chance," said the commissar, "the chance to prove your loyalty and good will. At this time, The People need only



your cattle. And you must give that of your own free will.”

Finally, Dhimitraq caved in.

“As you see fit,” he said, over the noise of submachine guns being loaded.

They left.

Dhimitraq grew sad and melancholic.

“What is wrong?” asked his good wife Vasilika one day while combing her greasy hair in front of the mirror, though she immediately bit her lip in regret. She knew his answer only too well.

Still, it was alright for a while. Dhimitraq had Ramo, his ancient donkey, and Sylesh, his one-eyed dog—the only two animals he had been allowed to keep (for the time being)—and they consoled him.

He worked hard in the new cooperative. Yet, the harder he worked, the less he got in return. Dairy products, like money and good

manners, kept growing scarcer. And although he could not make heads nor tails of any of it, he kept his head down and his work up. They must know what they’re doing, he kept telling himself; they are, after all, the liberators.

A year went by. Then another. Wheat bread and olive oil became delicacies. Yet Dhimitraq never stopped believing in the days of plenty still to come.

One day as he rode his donkey home, after cutting some branches in the beech forest, he noticed, outside a barn belonging to the cooperative, a familiar-looking animal.

Could it be him? My Murroi? His heart began to race.

He spurred his old donkey and approached.

There was little doubt in his mind now: tied up by some haystacks—Murroi.

He was all skin and bone, barely recognizable. His brown body was covered in dirt, ripped and bleeding. His front feet were nastily wounded, teeth black and corroded. He hung his head as if pained, and his eyes registered only sadness, deep as the Ionian Sea. But even then, when he noticed his old master approaching, Murroi recognized him and reacted.

Dhimitraq climbed off his donkey and hugged Murroi.

Murroi moaned achingly and licked his face. That broke Dhimitraq’s heart into pieces; he began to weep. He rubbed the animal’s scrawny neck, kissed his scratched forehead, and talked to him, as he had used to do. “What have they done to you, my dear boy? Your pain is my pain,” he said. “Your grief is my grief. And whatever they’ve done to you, they’ve done unto me. May I be buried alive for having abandoned you. I should’ve fought them with all my strength. But I will make up for my shameful deed; I will come at nightfall and take you away from these devils. May lightning strike me dead if I do not keep my word.”

Dhimitraq returned home and waited anxiously for nightfall. When the time came, he took his oil lamp, his axe, and headed for the cooperative barn. He had hatched a plan about how and where to hide and heal Murroi.

“Halt,” shouted a man’s voice.

Out of the shadows emerged a local police officer, escorted by two female soldiers armed with Kalashnikovs. Dhimitraq was stunned but did not lose his nerve. He could not possibly be arrested for strolling in the dark.

At the local police station, they told him they “knew everything.”

“Everything?”

“You have spoken against collectivization,” said the chief police officer. “Called cooperative officials ‘devils.’ Imagine! Accused them of cruelty against animals.”

Dhimitraq was completely dumbfounded and did not answer; he could not.

“You planned to take back your calf,” said the uniformed man, “steal it from its rightful place and owners. The People are his rightful owners now, not you.”

In court, Dhimitraq was read his charges: obstructing the Agrarian Reform Law, attempted theft, defending private ownership.

Eight years.

“Well,” said Tish, who was doing twenty for agitprop, attempting to escape and harboring dangerous elements, “your calf has not denounced you. You can put your mind at rest.”

Dhimitraq rubbed the back of his neck.

“It was him,” he said, in a tragic tone, “my Murroi. Because I abandoned him, and failed to protect him.”

“You could not do otherwise,” consoled Father Leon, an old monk and muralist.

“I gave my child away without a fight. I don’t blame him for turning against me.”

Zef, a man with wild hair, offered the old-timer a cigarette. “He

did not turn against you,” he said.

Zef was grave-looking. He had not laughed since his baby brother had been buried alive by governmental forces during a crackdown on enemy activity in the area. They had tied the men up in twos. One was shot under the armpit, then they were both thrown into open graves and covered with dirt. Zef had been a police operative before he was arrested for attempting to overthrow The People’s government.

“Then who did? There was no one else there.”

“Of course there was,” said Zef.

“Even if there was,” insisted Dhimitraq, who spoke very much in earnest, “they would’ve been too far away to hear what I said to Murroi.”

“You said there were haystacks,” said Tish, He was fastidiously dividing a small sugar cube into six pieces.

“Yes there were. Three of them.”

“There you go. There’s your answer. Somebody was hidden there. Three somebodies maybe.”



Artwork by Olena Kayinska

The old man shook his bristly head. "I would've heard them move. Ramo would've heard them move. He had the sharpest ears in the world."

"Who's Ramo?" asked Tish.

"My donkey."

"See, maybe the names are the issue here. Maybe your animals weren't all that happy with the names you gave them."

"I tried my best."

"Well, you should have consulted others maybe. What did you say your dog was called?"

"Sylesh."

"There you go. I think we've identified the problem here. Maybe Murroi was less than ecstatic about the name you gave him and that's why he informed on you."

Father Leon raised a hand as if in rebuke.

"I called him Murroi for a reason, just like I called my dog Sylesh for a reason. My calf was brown mainly, light brown—hence the name. My dog was shaggy-eyed—"

"Well," said Tish, "maybe he did not like that name: did not like the sound of it when you called him."

"What should I have called him?"

"I don't know. Mario, for instance."

"Mario? What are you talking about?"

Tish turned his head slightly and noticed that Zef was shaking with silent laughter.

"Hey!" he yelled, "I made Zef laugh!" He jumped to his feet. "Hey, you over on that side, listen up: I made Zef laugh!"

Zef laughed to himself all through the night.

Dhimitraq slept soundly, comforted by the idea that maybe, just maybe, his calf (that beautiful boy), had not been the one who denounced him.

Bio note: **Ron F Berisha**



Ron F Berisha lives between Albania and UK. His short stories have appeared in several literary magazines: *Literary Heist*, *The Hong Kong Review*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Anti-Heroic Chic* and *Synkroniciti*. They take place in and between England and Albania and have been assembled in a self-published collection titled *Gradually Then Suddenly*, available on Amazon. In the past, he has published poetry and reviews, both in English and Albanian, in newspapers and magazines such as *The London Student*, *Dielli*, *Translation Review*, and *Koha Jone*. Ron has written two memoirs and translated three books from Albanian to English. He also has a keen interest in film-making and has participated in the production of some short films.

The New Client

Michael Bird

A slam

The front door shook.

In the living room, I lay outstretched on the sofa bed, an old book of recipes to hand. As quietly as possible, I placed a white ribbon, embroidered with black crosses, on the page I was reading. I closed the book. I eased myself up, and my feet fell towards the floor, into a pair of leather slippers.

Again

In the cabinet near the hallway, cups and saucers tinkled.

Without moving or making a noise, I waited for the third bang.

Again

Standing up, I placed the book on an armrest and stepped into the bathroom. A glass stood on a shelf next to a box of matches. It held toothpaste and a brush. I emptied the glass, and filled it halfway with water. Taking out a match, I scraped its head on the side of the box. The flame grew thick and bright, and I dropped it in. It fizzled and spun into steam.

I hated what I saw in the bathroom mirror: puny arms and legs, and a height which hadn't shifted in the two years since eighth grade. I'd tried to dye my hair a kickass color, but I fucked up. Deep red was the plan. Orange was the reality. I wanted blood, and I got pumpkin. My t-shirt was long and loose, and printed with a manga cat eating noodles, its eyes slits. It was fun when I bought it. Now it seemed childish and silly.

I glanced at my hands, worried they were trembling. But I seemed calm—at least on the surface.



Photo by Gabor Sorok

I went to the front door and inspected the peephole.

Across the fish-eye lens spread a stout figure, with furrowed skin and a shaggy white beard that he probably clipped himself. His clothes were typical for the hot summers of Bucharest: a creased, short-sleeve shirt, khaki shorts and plimsolls with no socks.

“Hello,” I called out, “are you looking for something?”

“Good morning. I’m here to see Elena . . . Elena Irimescu.” His voice was polite, but nervous.

“Who are you?”

“It’s Gheorghe. Mr Gheorghe Gheorghiu. She will remember.”

I opened the door halfway.

Squinting, he looked me up and down, then adopted a lofty tone. “I was a colleague of Elena a long time ago. And you are?”

“Her granddaughter.”

“Of course.”

“You should come in.”

As he shuffled into the hallway, the stench of salami and sweat hit me. I withdrew into the living room.

“Nana died a month ago,” I said.

“Oh.” his eyes widened. “This is very sad. She was a fine woman. But death, I mean, it’s—”

“Surprising?”

“It didn’t seem possible.”

“I guess.”

“I’ll let you be.” He turned to leave.

“If you don’t mind me asking, why did you want to see her?”

“It’s a private matter, so it shouldn’t concern you.”

“Maybe I can help.”

“You?” he forced a laugh.

My brow tightened, and I deepened my voice: “I know stuff.”

Laughing harder, he threw out his hands. “This isn’t something you get from school. Or your phone.”

“Nana told me a lot.”

“That I don’t believe.”

“And I’m learning more.”

“From whom?”

“Through practice.”

“Then perhaps I should come back in a few years.”

“Can you wait that long?”

His gaze fell on the open entrance, and his shoulders relaxed, making his back stoop. A slight wheeze slipped from his throat.

“I have no money,” he said.

“It’s not a problem.”

“Or anything else.”

“Like I said, it’s not a problem.”

As I shut the door, he took off his plimsolls, revealing toenails capped with grime. In the hall, I opened a small cabinet and pulled out a pair of slippers. His large feet fit inside, but the soles of the slippers didn’t cover his heels. Following me into the kitchen, he checked under the table and pulled out a stool. He crouched down, his hips sagging over its edge.

“Would you like some coffee?” I said.

“I can’t. My heart.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Do you have sparkling water?”

“Yes.”

From the fridge, I took out a plastic bottle, and poured him a glass. He sank it fast, so I filled it up again.

“Where are your parents?” he asked.

“They’re in Italy.”

“So you’re alone?”

“It’s not so bad,” I said. “I have time for my profession.”

“Profession?”

“That’s what Nana called it.”



Photo by Gabor Sorok

Scanning the kitchen, his eyes fell on the chains of garlic hanging from the side of the cooktop, the potted herbs on the window-sill, the bowls stacked by the sink.

“I need a preparation,” he said.

“I understand.”

“It’s for a person who was cruel.”

“They hurt someone?”

“Yes.”

“Someone close?”

“Their own child.”

“Do you want to stop what this person is doing, or punish them?”

“Have you done this before?”

When Nana welcomed a client, she had me stay in my bedroom. But sometimes I tiptoed out, and loitered in the hallway. If the kitchen door wasn’t shut, I watched through the strip of light to where she was mixing a bowl, squeezing a rag, or emptying powder into a pan. She detailed every step of her work aloud, as though it helped her recall what she’d done before.

When the fumes became too dizzying, she seemed to realize I was there, and shouted at me to leave the apartment. So I ran down four flights of stairs, and out into the yard where I looked up at the block. Torrents of smoke flew from our window, carrying black, flickering shapes. Once these scattered, I came back to find the client gone. Filthy pots and rags littered the kitchen. Meanwhile, Nana spread herself out on the sofa in the living room, her eyes half-closed. I urged her to tell me what she’d done, but she brushed me off, as though I was a mosquito baying at her ear.

“Yes,” I replied to Gheorghe. “Many times.”

“Many times?”

Rubbing my brow, I took a deep breath.

“Before we begin,” I said, repeating a line Nana used, “I must ask you something important.”

“If you must.”

“Are you sure you want to do this?”

“I can’t go to the police, or put anyone through a trial. It’s not how it should be.”

“How should it be?”

“This person has to know what I’ve done to him”—Gheorghe’s tone sharpened—“and damn the consequences.”

I leaned against the kitchen worktop.

“I can make this now,” I said.

“Thank you.”

“Maybe you’d like to return in an hour or so?”

“I’d prefer to stay.”

Nana had nailed a woven rug of red and white diamonds onto the kitchen wall by the fridge. I looked over my shoulder to check if Gheorghe was looking at me, but he was tapping his fingers on the table, and staring out the window.

Folding back the rug, I pushed open a door. My skin shivered from the fall in temperature. On the ceiling hung a wreath of sage, mint and lavender, exuding earthy, sweet odors to hide what was kept there. Nailed to the sides of the room were iron shelves, loaded with jars of teeth from a comb, and shriveled objects, patched in fur and coated in mold. One jar held an oily paste, which was wax scooped from my ears.

I found a small container of reddish-black grains, the shape of caraway seeds. At dusk, Nana would scour the undergrowth of the city parks, catch bugs in a butterfly net, and trap them in plastic boxes. In the kitchen, she pinned their bodies to a chopping board, next to a row of open jars. She took apart the insects with tweezers and nail scissors, and placed each limb, wing case and antennae into different jars. She mashed what was left into a pap. This container held the horns of stag beetles.

On the bottom shelf sat unmarked vials of a clear solution, which I needed. Close by stood a rack of corked test-tubes, each holding a mirror-like liquid, topped by a layer of water and a film of scum. I picked up one of these.

Nana refused to take any cash for her services. In this room, behind

bags of dried cumin and rosemary, she stored canteens of home-made red wine, cartons of cigarettes, and bottles of plum brandy. These were gifts that Nana accepted as payment, and I didn’t really know what to do with them. On a row of hooks hung a mess of sickles, horseshoes, and pieces of frayed rope, plaited with red and black. Searching through these, I pulled out a rusted violin string.

On the top shelf lay a shoe box of pads, smeared with a blackish substance. Every month since I was twelve, Nana had reaped these from the pedal bin in the bathroom. I chose one that was dry and thickly crusted.

Once I brought all the ingredients to the worktop, I shut the door, and returned the rug to its place.

“You knew Nana— Elena— well?” I asked.

“We were from the same village, but we weren’t close.”

“Yet you both moved here?”

“Many years ago. We had jobs in the biscuit factory, near the railway station.”

“Were you friends with my grandpa?”

“The man Elena married?”

“Yes.”

“I hardly remember him.”

From below the sink, I took out a mortar and pestle. I chopped up three cloves of garlic, and poured their greasy fragments into the bowl. With a teaspoon, I measured out six beetle horns, and sprinkled these onto the garlic. Using nail scissors, I cut the pad into tiny squares, which I added to the mix.

“How did you know about Nana’s profession?” I asked.

“At the factory, people talked.”

“What did they say?”

“There were stories.”

“I’d like to hear them.”

“It was so long ago.”

With a pair of pliers, I chipped off a few pieces from the violin bow, and ground these into the other ingredients. I uncorked the silvery

fluid, and dipped a pipette below the surface, drawing up a single drop. A bitter fume burned my nostrils. My eyes swelled with water and I opened the kitchen window. I returned to the bowl and squeezed out the pipette, letting a speck fall into the paste, which I stirred in.

“Did Nana have problems with your bosses?” I asked.

“Definitely not.”

“She was a good worker?”

“It wasn’t that,” said Gheorghe. “They were terrified of her. We all were.”

“Why?”

“Do you know how many people ate the biscuits we made?”

I shook my head.

“Every boy and girl in the city.”

“I see.”

“No one ever pissed off Elena.”

Opening a drawer, I took out rubber gloves that were baggy around my fingers, but still usable. I found a rag in the cabinet under the sink, which I laid loosely across the rim of a jar, and fixed with an elastic band. On this cloth, I emptied the paste, and poured on the clear solution. This filtered into the jar, collecting into a pale liquid, the color of lemonade. Detaching the rubber band, I squeezed the soggy fabric in my fist until I had freed the last drops. I took off my gloves, turned them inside out and trashed them in a swing-bin by the door. With another pipette, I drew up the concentrate, which I squirted into an empty vial where it formed an ash-colored cloud. To stop this leaking, I plugged it with a cork.

On the table, I presented the final extract to Gheorghe.

“It will expire after twelve hours,” I said. “When you give this to someone, you must use it all. You can put it into their tea or wine, and it won’t be traceable, although it will taste strange in water. If you mix it into their food, it may lose its potency during boiling, so you should blend it with something that’s ready to be served, such as a stew, or spread it on the layers of a pancake.”

“Only twelve hours, you say?”

“Yes.”

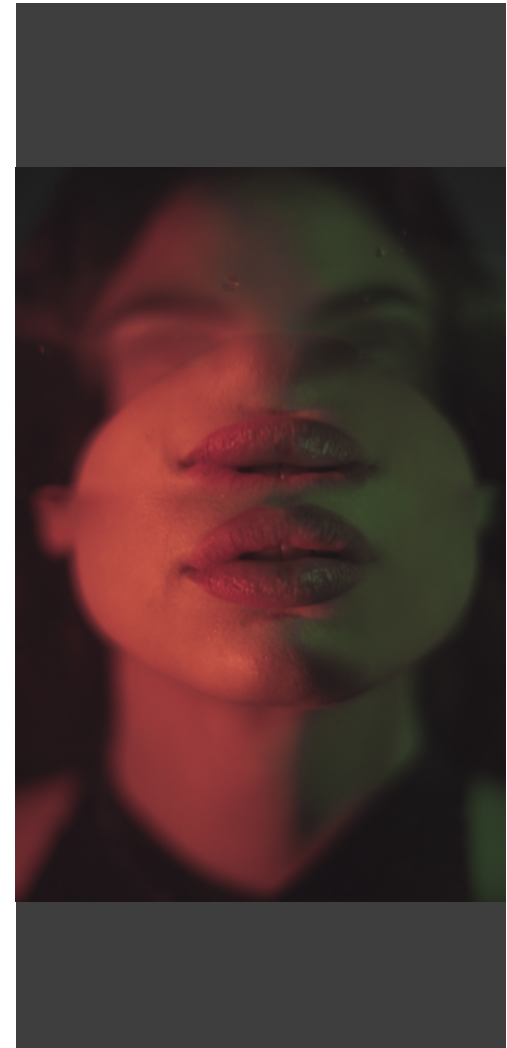


Photo by Gabor Sorok

“Then I should start right away.”

Gheorghe uncorked the vial, brought it to his mouth, and knocked back the contents. I wanted to smack it out of his grasp. Before I could try, he'd swallowed it all.

“How long till it works?” he said, wincing.

“I— I'm not sure.”

He verged on shouting: “How long?”

“A few minutes, maybe less. It depends, but you have to know . . .”

“What?”

“Its effect will never leave you.”

“Ah,” he rose from the stool. “Even better.”

Stumbling into the hall, he leaned on the door for support. As he changed out of the slippers, he almost tripped. His wheeze grew into a dry heave, making his body jerk and flounder. I wanted to punch his gut to force out the poison, or stick my hands into his throat, but he was too tall and large.

I felt so fucking useless.

When first-time clients came to visit Nana, she sat them down in the kitchen. On the gas ring, she heated a copper-brown *cezve* with water, white sugar and ground coffee. Once it frothed into the shade of caramel, she turned off the gas and poured the mixture into china cups.

The first words of the client were nearly always the same:

“I heard that you can help.”

As Nana sipped the hot coffee, a few grains collected on her lips, which she pinched away.

“I can help you,” she said, “but only as far as you can help yourself.”

Yes.

Of course.

I knew what to do.

Gheorghe limped out of the apartment and into the corridor,

clutching his belly, and coughing up phlegm. I stood with my back to the worktop, holding its edge. After the door closed behind him, I heard the elevator rattle to a standstill, the slump of the cabin floor, and the drag of cables.

I dumped the filthy rag in the swing-bin, and piled the glass, vials, chopping board, and mortar and pestle into the sink. I turned on the tap and waited for the hot water.

From the kitchen window, I watched him stagger through the yard. A neighbor from the block opposite was walking her dog, which sniffed the old man's plimsolls and trotted past. Gheorghe stooped against a lamp-post, catching his breath perhaps, or pausing to vomit. Lifting his head, he vanished down an alley between the blocks, towards a bus stop.

I shut the window, and started the washing-up.

Bio note: **Michael Bird**



Michael Bird (he/him) is a British writer and journalist, with fiction published by the *Porter House Review*, *Daily Drunk Mag*, *Lune Journal*, *Here Comes Everyone*, the Bristol Short Story Prize, *Storgy* and *Bandit Fiction*. As a journalist based in Bucharest, he's investigated organized crime, corruption in football, stray dog epidemics and vampire-hunters in Romania, killer home-made drugs in Georgia and Moldova, and the Russian war in Ukraine.

The Last City

Peter Newall

“For the form of *Babylon* the first City was square, and so shall also be the last, according to the description of the Holy City in the Apocalyps.”—Sir Thomas Browne, *Quincunx*, 1658

I suppose you could say I am something of an eccentric, and perhaps, as a consequence, that what I write here is not sound; that is a judgment you must make. It seems to me all real mathematicians are what the world would call eccentric, either because they care so much for mathematics that they have no room to spare for everyday matters such as knotting a tie, or else because they see a pattern to things that makes the conduct of those around them, of all human beings, of the universe, laughable, or pitiable, or terrifying.

I have lived in this city for nearly ten years now. It's not my home city, indeed this is not my home country, but I have come to be very fond of the place. The place perhaps even more than the people: the streets, the city blocks each with their different character, the occasional grand building, the acacia and chestnut trees that line the boulevards, the mistiness in the air rising from the seashore along which the city is built. The people I accept as necessary inhabitants of the city. Some few I call my friends and, a few others, colleagues. My teaching work at the local university satisfies me very well, even if my major discussions concerning mathematics are with persons outside this city, in letters to and from Heidelberg and London and Cordoba.

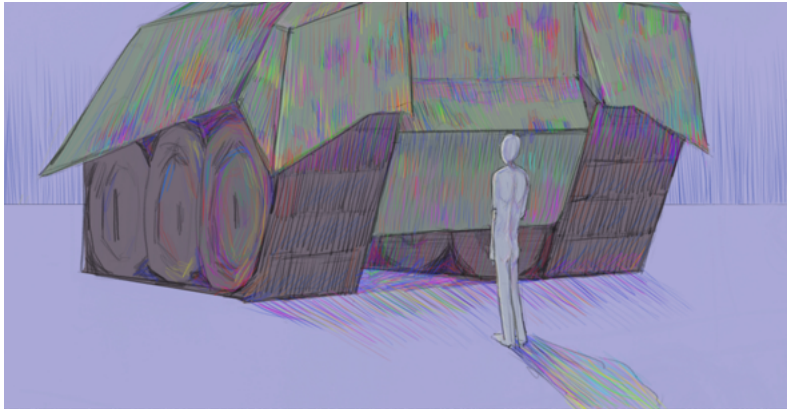
But the place itself: walking through it, choosing, each time, different routes, but always marking out a geometric pattern, is like walking through my own character, my own mind, my own life. Actually, yes, these streets are like veins and arteries to me; they carry life. Any walk through this city has the power to change my mood completely, to calm and uplift my spirit, only very rarely to disappoint or depress me. All my mathematical discoveries, such as they are, have come to me while walking through these sometimes charming and sometimes shabby streets. I love the shabby streets perhaps more than the charming, which have, after all, many admirers already.



Photo by Dr. Helge Paulsen



Artwork by Vika Ovechkina



Artwork by Vika Ovechikina

There is enough here to warrant my respect and affection, anyone's respect and affection. The Habsburg railway station, the Viennese Baroque opera theater, the banks, half of them in American-style blocky solidity, the others half with domes suggesting churches, the central park with its rose-garden and bandstand quite the equal of any in Europe. And the sea promenade itself, flanked by the old resort hotels that sprang up in the city's first great prosperity a hundred and fifty years ago. The people who stroll there in the evenings no longer wear crinoline dresses and swallow-tail coats and boaters, but a feeling of languorous elegance remains.

And now it is all in mortal danger, all of it, every stone, every window and doorframe, every corner and shadow and angle.

He has said, contemptuously, that he may bomb it, and we saw what his bombs did in Spain, in Guernica.

I suppose the great agony of that bombing, to any rational person, was the human suffering, rather than the destruction of the city itself. And that pain and outright extinction of people I cannot envisage. But what leaves me feeling utterly weak and sick at the prospect of this bombing, so easily done, carried out from far above by well-drilled, fit young men in new, efficient aircraft, and all at a mere gesture from him, is that the city will be brought to ruin.

And forgive me, forgive me, but people will be born and fill up the country afterward, as always, as ever, though that does not make well again your grandmother or son crushed to death or torn to bits in a

bombardment, I know, I know.

The city, though, will not. Of course cities are rebuilt anew, over and over again; how many times was Jericho sacked and rebuilt, or Rome, or Salonika. But they are never again, can never be again, the cities they were. They will exist in that form only in memory, and memory will erode and then die out, and the city that was will be gone. And with that, here in this place, a good part of my life will be irrecoverably lost. It will be the last city for me.

Why do I say all this? Because I am walking through the streets, as I always do, but today with a heavy gray knot of anguish in my chest, waiting to learn his decision. He already knows whether this city, my home now, the internal and external map of my life, will be destroyed. He knows, but he does not say. The waiting is almost crueler than the act. I say that, but of course it is not true, not true at all. That is just my weakness, my distress, my fear.

At times I believe, as I turn a corner or wait at a traffic light or read a familiar shop-sign, as a red-and-yellow tram full of ordinary people rattles past me, that he will do no such thing, that the city will continue to stand, just as it does now, and live, changing only by those gradual alterations that every city experiences, changes that one can, in most cases, generally live with. Then in the next moment I seem to see the dome of the Opera Theatre crashing down in a huge orange cloud of dust and smoke, the plaster facades along Elizabeth Boulevard bursting under the weight of bright explosions, the footpaths twisted, the park torn up, and everything burning, burning. And people lying torn and bleeding and dead, yes.

Why won't he say? Why won't he give a sign?

Bio note: Peter Newall



Peter Newall was born in Sydney, Australia, where he worked variously in a naval dockyard, as a musician and as a lawyer, but later lived in Kyoto, Japan, and then Odessa, Ukraine, where he sings for a popular local R&B band, the Newall Band. His stories have been published in England, Hong Kong, Australia and the USA. This story was written on 23 February 2022, in Odessa.

Summer Camp '89 Mixtape

Suzanne Hermanoczki

The soundtrack to Summer Camp for Foreigners!

1. Like Blisters in the Hungarian Sun

Most of the hot kids going to camp are foreigners. Foreign to each other in many ways. The biggest divide is between the hot Western kids and cool Eastern Bloc communist kids. The biggest wall dividing the boys takes the form of a guy from East Germany aka the gray boy from Berlin. His eyes like his skin like his hair like his clothes are a variation of gray. He wears weird glasses. Not cool flip top metal rimmed ones, but Eastern bloc ones. He doesn't smile. Doesn't speak English. Doesn't speak Hungarian. The American boys are freaked out by his dead gray staring eyes watching them and their every move. Eastern Bloc boy has been assigned to their dorm room and takes the last bed left, the bottom bunk with the Western European boys. From the top bunk the Swiss-German boy with a black mohawk who's been nicknamed Eyeliner, leans down and hands Eastern Bloc boy a Walkman and headphones and says something in German like Listen to this and presses play. Song 1. The Violent Femmes. Guitar intro then Gordon Gano urging him to go-ooooo-oooo. By the end of that song, gray Eastern Bloc boy's cheeks are flushed a deep burning red, like two blisters in the sun.

2. Hey teacher, play that record again

The Summer Camp for Foreigners isn't all about kids on kirándulás. There are lessons to be learnt. Hungarian for the hot Western kids and English for the cool Eastern Bloc kids. To their shame, a handful of Western kids get dubbed the Absolute Beginners because they can't speak a word of their ancestral tongue. Their teacher Eva *néni* tries teaching the Absolute Beginners their Hungarian ABCs, which should be as easy as saying your name after one two three. She puts a record on. Jo nappot kivanot, itt Szabo Janos. Without understanding, they repeat, 'Good day everyone, I'm John Taylor.' Eva *néni* shakes her head. Compared to the other happy campers like Natty Kat and Mony who start talking faster as they master the language, these hot Western kids are starting to crack.



Photo from the personal collection of Suzanne Hermanoczki

Cue the old folk and old style musicians who turn up one sunny afternoon to teach the Absolute Beginners simple sad songs about birds and dying flowers *madárka* and *beteg a viragom* and *lassu* dance steps to go with their folkloric *csárdás* violin melodies. Soon, those hours repeating after Eva *néni* seem to disappear as the Absolute Beginners learn to sing these words as they twist and shout—hop hop hop—stomping their feet on the ground, mixing it with the old folk and the other hot Western and cool Eastern Bloc kids as everybody on the dance floor cuts footloose.

3. Money Can Buy Me Bootleg Beatles

After class, outside the *fagylalt* parlour, the hot Western kids buy themselves love in the form of *csokoládé* ice-cream cones for peanuts. The ice-cream seller laughs at Eddie from Lux's literal translation of watermelon. *Víz-dinnye*, he says. *Görög-dinnye*, she corrects. Nearby, a man stands watching, waiting. He isn't there for just anybody. In fact he's come especially for them. He opens his case of cassettes. Please, please

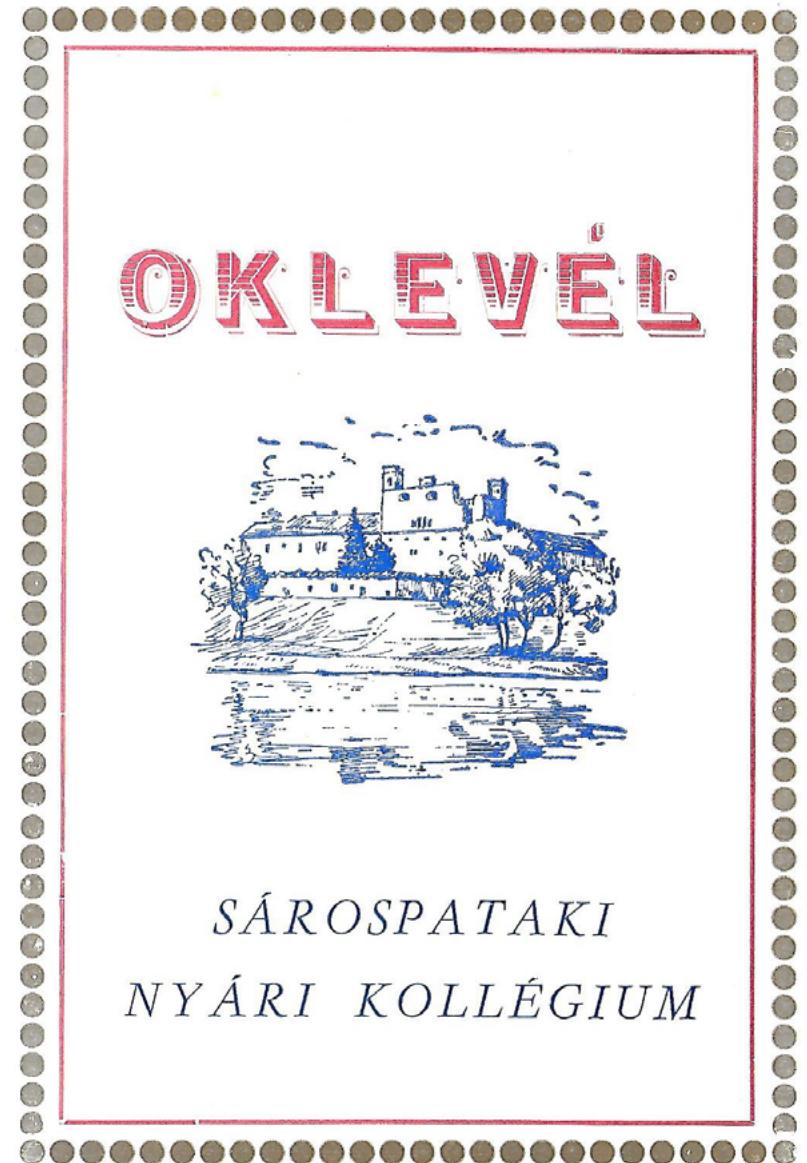
let me show you! Eddie from Lux translates, they're not real Beatles tapes but rip offs, their covers color photocopies on recycled paper, but those Western babies don't care. For a couple of forint, the hot Western kids buy the lot. Tell your friends, the man says, as the kids help him out in oh so many ways.

4. I repeat, the Stratofortress has breached the Cold War party. Stop. Hot Western kids take down dance floor with a Rock lobster.

Begin transmission: Friday night. Hot Western kids with their teased hair are getting ready to parrrrrtaaayyy. BUFF (Big Ugly Fat Fella) Hungarian Party leader is unaware that his backyard shed will soon become a bootleg nightclub until he's in way too deep. Hey Mr. DJ, can you play this cued song? Eddie from Lux translates from English into Hungarian. Girls with mixtapes. Boys with dance moves. Cue, the Cure's Killing an Arab intro. The hot Western kids all begin to move backwards. As the music picks up, they start slamming into each other. Soon, everybody's moshing. Everybody's pogoing. It's like a B52 cultural bomb has gone off with everyone going down down down. Everywhere, the hot Western kids are down down down on the dance floor. The local Hungarians stand by speechless, witnesses to this scene of cross cultural carnage. The hot Western kids get down then back on up week after week of the summer camp they keep coming back keep dancing keep asking the DJ to play their songs until the clash creates lots of trouble. You can stay, the Hungarian Party leader pleads with Eddie from Lux, but the Cure tapes have got to go. End of translation.

5. Hey You, Hungary kids!

Post-camp and the cool kids from Hungary are hungrier than wolves for the hot Western kids, kids like you and your friends Natty Kat and Mony from Canada. The Cold War kids think the West is the best, where coke comes in cans where everyone eats McDonalds where everyone wears Levis while watching MTV. There'll be invites to their houses to speak English to stay to meet their *anya* and *apa* and *nagymama* and *nagypapa*. The cool indie Hungarian kids will turn up at your aunt's apartment on Szinva utca to take you to underground bars that are in the basement. They'll want to get so close to you sitting on your aunt's sofa while watching government sanctioned daytime TV. But like it's hard for you to speak or comprehend



what's going on across the border with Ceaușescu. It's harder to explain what it means to grow up free, to be and do and think what you want, any old time.

6. Freedom (Wall is Over)

Then one cold November night, you'll hear the news breaking over the TV. Watching crowds gather, you'll spot a gray boy in Berlin, he'll be joined by so many other gray boys and girls shouting at the Wall—down, down, down! With a cold chisel in hand, he'll climb on top of the wall. His hair will be big and boofy. He'll be wearing Levis jeans, round John Lennon glasses, and black eyeliner. He'll be fist pumping in the air, shouting and screaming, Freedom, yeah yeah yeah! about all the things that are happening now and those yet to come. Natty Kat will send you a *poste restante* letter saying how she chipped off a piece of the wall with a broken chair.

Later, back in your suburban Western home in Brisbane, as people gathered around to sing happy Christmas and ask what you've done, you say how you were there when the world opened. You were there with your music and mixtapes as walls and blocs and curtains were finally torn down.



Bio note: Suzanne Hermanoczki



Suzanne Hermanoczki is an academic, writer and creative writing teacher. Her critical and creative works on death, memory and postmemories, trauma and the immigrant journey, code-switching, identity, and multiculturalism, have been published in local and international publications. She holds a PhD and Master's degree in Creative Writing from the University of Melbourne, where she currently teaches.

Our Dear Friend,

We are glad to welcome you as a participant of the Sárospatak Summer Course.

We want to inform you about a few important details of our programme.

The members of the Camp are secondary school pupils /14-18 years old/ from all over the world. They are of Hungarian origin and want to learn Hungarian language and are interested in Hungarian culture, literature or folk music. Some of the participants are from Hungarian secondary schools.

The Camp will be held from 17th July to 14th August in every year in one of the Collages of Sárospatak, Rákóczi's ancient town.

The participants are due to get together in front of the Building of the Patronage of Mother Tongue Conference /Budapest, 1068. Benczur u.15./ between 7.30 and 8,0' clock in the morning on the 17th July. They will be taken to Sárospatak from Budapest by buses.

They are to arrive back to Budapest approximately between 3 or 4 o' clock p.m. on 14th August.

The aim of the Camp is to teach you some Hungarian and enrich your knowledge about Hungarian culture, economy and way of living. It helps you to communicate with young people of a different language and culture and to develop your mental and physical skills.

It gives you a chance to make some new friends.

Balcony for Rent

Ákos Szolcsányi

Jun 26th, 2019

I bet on lukewarm. Or I am a bet being placed on it, I don't know. In any case, my first impulse usually leads me to make excuses for what's bad or try to pick on what's good. Postpone extreme situations for as long as possible (so that, when they occur, their inertia also increases their effect—has a function, even if it is not part of a system).

So it's no wonder that talking about emigration gives me a headache. The narrative of both traitor and persecuted talent abounds, evoking (and escalating) extreme emotions. That one can't live here (whereas one certainly can). That one can only live here for real (as opposed to not at all). That you will always be a stranger there (as well as here). That things work there (here too, meaning the way things are, that's the way they work).

I want to work part-time so I can write an hour or two a day, sleep seven or nine, make a living. To bring out, though unfairly, the paternal arguments: since most lessons don't begin at 7:00, recommended shooting range attendance, mandatory chorus for my kid so far as that's possible. That might be asking a lot. How about the fillings out of my fucking teeth while you're at it? I say to myself in a bouncer's voice. Now he's pleased with himself for repeating one-liners from Terminator 2. He will come too. If I can, I will not disavow anything. Then why all the fuss? This is the romantic lyrical voice, I tell him. He's not the sharpest knife in the drawer.

As for the specifics, there aren't a lot of representative moments, or there are way too many. Like an exam period, a landmark event every two to three days, from May until probably December. Of course, there are always points of focus. You just have to look at the situation until one motif proves to be more stubborn than the others. Our car, for example, is there at our most anxious moments, one, maybe two layers deep. It doesn't run too well. It's not pretty. I don't really know how to drive or to love it. We could live without it, maybe even more easily than with it. I found out a

week ago that its air conditioner exists; so much for my storied expertise. There are no strong memories associated with it. We used it to do the shopping on weekends and to go to Göd. We were doing fine before we got it, or at least we're not better off since. I'd be ashamed if it turned out I was too attached to it. I've seen people freak out at car shows. I can guess what kinds of people feel like that.

In the absence of symbolic emotions, it's some impersonal sense of defiance that keeps it parked here: its undercarriage making scary noises at over 100 kph or when driving on cobblestones, its Hungarian license plate inspiring fits of dark silence wherein I wonder how much it may cost me yet. The perseverance of this defiance has nothing to do with virtue. It's like having 1956 in your social security number. I am relieved to think that someday it will no longer be a part of our lives. In the meantime, I stifle the urge to forswear it with the hissing wickedness I learned from The Midas Touch. I don't give a damn whether true patriots remain, we ride in our Suzuki Alto, the black pearl of India.

The distance between Budapest and Berlin on the highway is 870 km. At around 430-440 kilometers, near Prague, there's a MOL gas station, technically halfway. No place like home, we joked. An oasis for Huns like us. Our friend helped me drive and then flew back. I was still grinning

when I realized it was never an escape, it was just our way forward. After we arrived, the first thing I noticed was a repair shop, about five meters from where the car was parked. Now it can fall apart, one of us said. I am not being secretive about which one of us said this. I don't remember. Twenty-one years of friendship permits such forgetfulness.

I bet on lukewarm. It's worked out so far.



Photo by Maria Gyarmati

Aug 23rd, 2019

If Berlin's rents are not as high as Paris or London, it's largely because the city has a decree regulating how much landlords can raise them. At the same time, demand is very high, so that a landlord who advertises his apartment often has 30 to 40 applicants to choose from. Ultimately, who gets the apartment is somewhat random, although there are some requirements: proof of income, positive credit rating, cover letter. In the gray area: call from a German number, speak German on the phone.

So, two years after defending my thesis, I signed a letter for the first time as a PhD, because that's what counts here. Well, about thirty letters. And I didn't sign them, I copy-pasted. We pasted a picture of the three of us in the top left corner of the cover letter, smiling sweetly. We look white, as discreet an indicator as the sensuality of Vincent Vega's foot massages. As we've learned, this is a good idea for people with such spectacularly non-German surnames. And what did I think would be said, when it's not the money talking? The plan is to become landlords in a couple of years, and then we can choose to ignore photos and practice affirmative action. Plus, one has to live. The clock is ticking. We have a child. Also, we don't



Photo by Maria Gyamant

lie, we're actually really nice. And white. And I was a landlord back home. There are plenty of people who can attest that I wasn't picky. Some of my best friends are etc. To stick to the point: we included a photograph.

The total processing power of our electronics with an internet connection is enough for a moon landing, though it's not enough to keep me from losing my mind in the time it takes for the apartments to load. The scanned IDs are on a machine without internet. We can print from all the computers, but can scan only on the one without a connection: toner change, a purchase of printing paper, sockets, pendrives, Sunday closures, the child waking up during our discussions, sleeping during print jobs. No response to ten or fifteen ads. Anxiety slowly builds, dull and thick as clogged drain muck. No quarrels. Then we get closer: an apartment rented out at the last minute, an actual rejection letter, an agent on vacation, until finally the first viewing that requires our physical presence. We suspect that it is really us who are being viewed. Clean jeans are in order. We don't go as far as cloth trousers. We walk to the tram with the dignity of chief administrators.

4:30 and we're on our way out of town, even further out than our current apartment. We mingle with people coming home from work. There's a seat. A few meters away from us, a young African man asks if he is going in the right direction on the tram. He is looking for the same street we're going to. He will be our unwary competition. He's dressed about the same as us. We have no sense of being threatened. We have enough to do without indulging in the fear of losing something we don't even have. We imagine him asking us for the address, and us smiling as we send him off towards Alexanderplatz. We imagine that the landlord is an AfD voter, and that we refuse to let him choose us and that our respect for our fellow man goes viral on Twitter. Then, that the landlord opts for affirmative action and chooses him on principle. Then the subject dies out. We remember that there will most likely be at least ten other people interested, that our situation is more like the young man's than theirs.

Four of us get out, him and us. We look around to see where our street is. He heads off first, but on the corner he asks us if this is it. It is, we tell him. Which one is number one? he asks. We're going to number twelve, but there's no real relief yet. We give directions, are being sociable. We'll deal with ourselves later. Maybe this, I point to the first building on the odd side, a graveled courtyard used as a car park, a four-story gray

building, unnaturally long, proportioned like a caterpillar. The lettering on the facade is abundant. There are no deceptive abbreviations. Even to me, the sign is clear. It says, “homeless shelter.” The young man smiles and thanks me for the directions and heads off, perhaps to work, but more likely toward home. A quarter of an hour later, I’m standing on the balcony of house number twelve, overlooking the back of the caterpillar. Its fluffy antennae are illuminated by the late afternoon sun.

Feb 2020

As it turns out, I actually get to be part of the auxiliary workforce at a hotel located in Alexanderplatz no less. They don't cover social security, but it's legal. Up to ten hours a week, four hundred and fifty euros a month. It's suitable for students, expectant mothers and overqualified Spanish teachers. Kitchen, catering. I smile, refill the plate of fried chicken breasts, but I'm getting ahead of myself. I sign on the first, third and sixth page. Contract, privacy agreement, guaranteed number of work hours while at the hotel. I have not read through the text, but with fallen arches, pimples, teeth slightly below the Central European standard, being a smoker and thirty-six years old, I have a hard time imagining myself as a person of interest to human traffickers.

Anyway, I get a uniform: an apron, a shirt, pants. Two of each, one set with the hotel logo, the other with their own canteen. Yes, I can wear this. With the faith and trust of an exchange student. I am not really looking forward to smiling, but even less to the other possible attitude: that of haughty affronted self-importance. I feel no indifference. I have too many children for that. It's good to take a look back. A couple of weeks ago, I had no jobs at all. And looking ahead, it seems like things will be better in a few months.

My domestic status is further enhanced when my wife is fired. She was somewhat offended by the circumstances. For a couple of months, she was told that everything was okay, that her position was secure. She was told before she was fired that she hadn't been working well. The fact that each of these assessments were transparent lies is comforting, but, at the same



Photo by Maria Gyarmati

time, the situation is difficult because the two lies are mutually exclusive. In such cases, it is difficult to hold onto the notion that neither is true. However, we don't feel any serious anxiety about it. We are too busy with the relief felt over the end of this status quo, and with the shame inherent in what may come—welfare for her and the catering for me.

The reaction of our folks back home is actually positive. If it was bad, they tell my wife, it's good that it ended. If what comes next is bad, they tell me, it's still better than nothing. Sometimes those who love are forced to contradict themselves. But they do love us, so they ignore logic like the hungry ignore nutrition labels. There is one more notable exception, a male acquaintance of mine, now in his second childhood, can't help but recall that the emperor has no clothes, that I was already a waiter in Salamanca in 2007 and was fired. He wonders if catering is a good fit for me. It won't be a good fucking fit, dammit, but there's nothing else, so the emperor forgets his manners. You can't slam down a smartphone. I'm pushing the red icon. It doesn't work because it doesn't have to be pushed, but pulled to the left, evenly. It won't let me. I'm not even. From my emergency reserves, I conjure up the serenity I need to pull evenly. I succeed.

One good thing about love is that you can recharge from the joy of others. Kid is in kindergarten, basically content, she's already singing this and that in German. My wife is free and will find a better job. We're on our way. I think back on someone who pissed me off. He rolled the dice at work. Once over forty, he submitted his resignation. The management blinked, then gave him a raise. He earned well for half a year, and then, his successor identified, was fired. Beyond that, he did what was necessary. For him, immigration, a new profile, especially with a child, the value of two flats as his rainy day fund, were all superfluous vicissitudes. He was from the wrong age group, in the wrong country. It was a miracle that he lasted seven months without being a smartass. He sent an email, a compound sentence about being sorry.

In a couple of weeks I have my first day of work: 17.00-22.00, kitchen. There are no recipes. I bring this. I take that. I get to know the others, either half my age or from twice as far away as I am. They wonder what am I doing here—a Spanish teacher—even if my German is not yet up to snuff. I didn't talk about my published volumes of poetry, nor my doctorate. They either wouldn't understand or care or believe it; if they did, they might beat me up for rummaging through their daily lives as a disaster tourist. I play the child card as a perfunctory excuse. Also, we live far away, and nowadays all work should be appreciated. Wuhan, that was the word for it at the time. Alone with the dirty dishes of the thirty-strong Portuguese student choir, I almost rejoice at the word: disaster tourist, a student of human nature, I am still blonde. My eyes are still blue. I checked the locker room. I'm a fucking prince in disguise, one who just earned forty-seven euros. Tax free!



Photo by Maria Gyarmati

Mar 2020

Now we're cooking. I've been approached by two places. A text message, still at home. A phone call, while I was on my way to the kindergarten. After brief and meaningful communication, it turns out I don't have to interview at either place. I'm relieved and scared. What kind of job can one you get without being interviewed?

Content moderation at a large social media provider. They won't say which one, but it's Facebook. The intermediary company calls me. A lady informs me that there may be violent videos sometimes, but there will also be funny and interesting ones. Do I agree to non-disclosure et al. I do. Send me what you have. We'll sign the contract next Wednesday.

The other text message was for a fast food job. I don't know if I can legally tell you which one, but at McDonald's. The job description is not particularly detailed here, Crew Member. Kitchen, possibly checkout overtime. Minimum wage, thirty hours a week. I was looking for part-time work anyway, so I could work on the novel, the child, the life. We could kind of make ends meet and we've discussed that we won't worry about the money. They see that I have a driver's license and wonder if I also have a car. I do. How far do I live? *Ungefähr*. Then I could do night shifts. "Sounds good, in me too." I mess up the conjugation in my enthusiasm. I start on Saturday.

Having lied to one of them with 100% certainty, I will definitely have a declared, taxable income. I read up on the moderation job a little bit to find out what it's all about. After reading one article, it seems like hell. After three articles too. I don't read the fifth all the way through. Child pornography, animal torture, beheading videos, compared to which hate speech mentioning the interlocutor's jewess whore of a mother is an intellectual triumph, as it has, at least, linguistic form. There's half a minute for each case. That's how quickly I have to decide which point (if any) of the twenty-five-page, weekly-updated policy is being violated by the content. If I can't maintain 90% efficiency, or am too slow, I can be fired on the spot. Also minimum wage, full-time, shift work. Pros: I would learn what people are like. Also, what kind of a person I am. The rate of PTSD among war veterans is comparable to that among content moderators. Proletarians of the digital age, we'll grind our brains down to keep the users' safe spaces

safe. Sixteen tons. Working-class hero driving the last spike. I can always quit if I feel like I can't hack it.

At the same time, there's no shame in admitting that I don't care much about what people are like. I have no doubt that, virtues aside, even the most serious intellectual attempts at imagining just how terrible they can be are merely a childish fantasy compared to the truth. No amount of self-awareness is worth not being able to bathe a child after eight hours of flagging pedophilic content. Hell, I can't bear to the thought of playing hide-and-seek once I get a few doses of humanity. During their ten-minute breaks, employees have sex due to the accumulated anxiety. They do this without thought, joy or restraint; let them be material for another writer. I have nothing to prove to anyone. I google how far the office is from home. An hour and a half. Ok, that's it. Even if my mixed feelings of guilty conscience and exhaustion regarding my fruitless job hunt led me to pull this Nastasia Filippovna-esque self-punishment stunt, no way am I getting up at 8 p.m. and going to bed at 8 a.m.

So McD's it is. It will be awkward to serve other parents from the kindergarten. But they say no matter what kind of job you have, as long as you have one, you're good with the Germans. Besides, who gives a damn what anyone thinks? I'll steal the Happy Meal games for my child. She will start dealing the stuff. By summer the Szolcsányi clan will own the Grasshopper group. Part-time, *ungefähr* five minutes by car. If corona gets really nasty and kills the business, I'll be fired. I'm trying to picture the getting nasty part, digging mass graves in the Wilhelmshagen woods next to the Nazi labor camp monument. Survivor orgies next to the Soviet Liberation Monument in Friedrichshagen. We'll see. History has come into our lives. Sometimes it has to. And who are we to be the first to escape it? I get even more optimistic when I read that it's not as dangerous to kids. On Friday, I sign the papers and ask for a morning menu, the last one I'll ever eat in blissful ignorance. I will lose those extra kilos working, get some burgers free of charge, get closer to the working class and the German youth. It will be picaresque or whatever. Maybe because of the abyss I saw in the moderation job, or because of the four months of sitting at home, or maybe because, like a mild case of Stockholm syndrome, can't help but love what I'm doing, I enjoy being me for a few minutes. Like the grease-proof paper I'm rattling, my destiny is in my hands.

Feb 2022

We're having a fight on Friday night. Brief, routine, in a solid MSN medium. We settle it by reassuring each other, but if there are only four people on the planet, even the slightest movement makes everything spin. It's like trying to work out in a hot-air balloon while the other passengers are sleeping. The dizzying sway slowly subsides into benign rocking. Hatred looms up before me like the hookers on the way home after drunken nights at the turn of the millennium. If I had dared to answer them then, I would have words now. I try to leave it behind as I left them behind. Alone again.

I recognize sadness like the gate of my apartment building. I enter. It's not as cold as I expected. February, winter, but it won't last. Familiar water stains. Home. Eternal but harmless, everything fits inside it, even happiness. I look around to see where I can put it, and then go to bed. I dismiss the body, thinking about three women, one from each group: the have-beens, the never-wases, the would-bes.



Photo by Maria Gyarmati

For a good year and a half, I seldom sleep through the night. The monsters come out around half-past two, an intermission between two blocks of sleep. They are aggressive, but impatient, fallible, making it easier sometimes, sometimes harder. They come at me first, tell me that I do not exist, that everything I've ever done is either insignificant or bad, everything other than being mediocre. They are wrong and I am tired of refuting them. They wouldn't believe it anyway. I just look at them, thinking that I'm good, and compared to them, I am. That used to be enough. Not today. Today it's bad. Today they pick on my child. An immigrant with divorced parents, hungry for love. She will be as weak as you. Her body will be taken by those below, her soul by those above. And I'll just watch, same as I do now. If I live to see it.

That's when I feel the pressure in my heart. Since the second shot, I feel it every now and then. I notice I'm lying on my left. I should get a bed frame under the mattress, it's on my list. Could afford it now. I can cry to the left, that would help. I'll see if I can. Not today. Today is bad. But it's there, like storm clouds, taking their time, clean and attractive, the certainty that now it's going to get a little worse and then everything, overall, better. I let go of this perspective as I let go of resistance. If I can't cry, then I can't. Having taken a piss, I lie back, facing right. My heartbeat slowly relaxes: that still level of sleep, a sharp and then rapidly dulling dream like a chessboard on which black and white are frayed and dirty and in harmony.

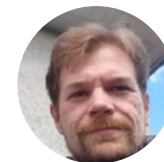
On Saturday afternoon, I am standing where I was talking on the phone the night before. A joint lunch organized around Saturday's handover took place as usual, and now that's the most I can hope for; sometimes monotony gives a more credible sense of progress than giant leaps. Nothing special as far as the meal goes: pasta, pesto, bacon. I know how much cheese and what kind each of us want, superficial gestures, but in laying the foundations, it's not the perspective but the stability that matters. Then we can build whatever we want, a possible language course, how our week was. My daughter has three husbands. She talks about them cleanly and correctly, even though she herself is in love with only one of them—without jumping the gun, safe and predictable like a comet. Like Rilke's Creature, she looks at the Open with all her eyes, even though we pushed her around from country to country, apartment to apartment, marital status to marital status, so much that she might have become helplessly cunning. Being complicit, I feel no pride, rather relief, as if I were stopping at a quarter

distance while long-haul swimming, examining the surface of the water, gripping securely the clumsy bay of the handrail. Embracing both the difficulty and the serenity of raising a child, like having to swim the full distance, but without any time limit.

After dessert, we stay alone with mum for a few minutes. We have an unusually calm conversation lacking resentment and regret about the fact that we are no longer a family. We also offer up an unusual, almost adult-like acknowledgment of this. It feels true, or at least honest: no promises, no comfort. A couple of weeks ago, she said something that hit me below the belt. We've pretty much sorted it out, but now I'm asking her not to say things like that again. She apologizes in an encouraging way, almost adult-like.

We say goodbye to her. I will be a father again, the only thing I'm certain I am. I light up my post-dessert coffee with cognac left from New Year's Eve. A cigarette, Brubeck's "Take Five." Today is good. The kid comes over and asks for a kiss, so do I. We get it, the cognac is sweet. The wind doesn't disperse the smoke. I watch it swirl around for a little while. It's only 1 p.m. Today is good.

Bio note: **Ákos Szolcsányi**



Ákos Szolcsányi was born in Budapest in 1984. He is a Berlin-based writer, hispanist and teacher. His last book, titled *Piros*, was published in the series *Műút könyvek*, in 2020. The series *Balcony for Rent* is his first attempt at non-fiction (or, for that matter, any genre in English).

25 Rules for Leading a Noble Life

Imola Eva Zsitva

1. Your existence is a fluke, and you are certainly not entitled to a 'happy life' (an American invention).
2. Learn to walk, talk, eat and shit by yourself—and learn to do these things early. Nobody is going to do them for you.
3. Develop an appreciation for art and architecture (preferably from conception, but no later than birth).
4. Sound like you know what you're talking about (if you must open your mouth), even if you don't read.
5. Money is the root of all evil. People who have money are immoral, corrupt, fat, or greedy. Choose: would you rather be rich, or a human being? (Note, there is only one correct answer.)
6. Face your nightmares when you wake up all alone. They're not real.
7. For a dose of reality, keep tabs on your parents' debts and expenses. You think boy trouble is hard? Think again!
8. Learn to endure physical pain. It makes you tougher. A jar of honey goes a long way toward curing a nasty cough in the middle of the night (just don't wake us up).



Photo by Gabor Sorok

9. No grade below a perfect 5 is acceptable, but don't expect help with your homework (we are busy people).

10. Emotions (an American fixation) are overrated. They'll get you nowhere except into therapy (an American hobby).

11. 'I love you's are to be saved for special occasions. They are not synonymous with 'goodbye.'

12. Compliments make you conceited. Better to be humble and preserve a healthy level of self-loathing.

13. Laughter is annoying (and unattractive). Make yourself useful instead. Wash the dishes and/or make the bed.

14. Leave singing to the professionals. You are not Maria Callas.

15. Dress well. Put on your best suit for the dentist and your nicest slip for the gynecologist. You don't want them to think that you're poor, unclean, or that you have bad taste.

16. Remember your manners. If you stab people in the back, do it with style. Smile politely (always) but don't laugh.

17. Take pride in your suffering and in enduring gloomy Sundays. Life isn't supposed to be fun, and nobody owes you anything. In the end, there is only one possible outcome and it's the same for everyone: death. Romanticize it in poetry and songs and in your National Anthem.

18. Nobody is happily married. Some are just better at pretending than others.

19. Children need to be disciplined, not indulged. Adults are in charge.

20. Children are not cute. They should grow up fast and make themselves useful.

21. Children should keep quiet, respect adults and be impeccably well-mannered. Their opinion is of no interest to anyone until they've graduated from high school (with a 5.0 GPA).

22. Hurry up already! *Menjél már!*

23. Learn to be self-sufficient and self-reliant. People always want something in return and will probably stab you in the back (while they smile).

24. Love (an American fabrication) is overrated. It makes you weak.

25. Be tough. Be tough. Be tough.

Bio note: **Imola Eva Zsitva**



Imola is a Hungarian born writer whose multilingual background continues to inform her writing, which is characterized by experimentation in form as well as content. Her plays have been produced in London, including "Someplace Else," which previewed at the Hungarian Culture Centre and won the Croydon Theatre's International playwriting festival. Her short fiction, non-fiction and poetry have been published in Canada in *Yolk Literary*, *Soliloquies Anthology*, *Agnes and True* and *Grain Magazine*. Imola has recently completed her novel *Love Bombing: A Mirage in Text Messages* and is working on a Dante inspired play in Italian. She divides her time between Budapest and Montréal.

The Icon

Paul Jaskunas

Knowing well that night will flood
even the holiest church, you kneel
before the saint's face.

The perfect darkness will soon mob his eyes.
His ears will fail to hear the whispers
gathering behind the black altar –

a wind that lisps though a crack
in the glass. Always the weather
finds a way to get in –

always the rain, the frost, the centuries –
the moan of walls grown tired of standing.
And still the eyes of the icon watch.

They watch the pious, the doubtful,
the shamed, the false, the true.
How many generations have turned

to dust beneath his feet?
How many souls have surrendered
here their secret grief?

Not once have the saint's eyes blinked,
cried, or slept. Year after year,
as dependable as stars,

as planets in ancient orbit,
the icon waits here for you.
You in your flesh

kneel before him. Seen or not seen,
heard or not heard, here
you too are enfolded

in the fixed gaze of things,
in the long, churning
prayer of the earth.



Artwork by Weronika Wrzosek

History

Paul Jaskunas

Welcome to the village –
six houses on a hill, a dot
of ink on a fading map
in someone's attic.

It once had a name. Now
moss greens the shingles,
the apples fall to the grass,
wasps drone to the rot.

The wind genuflects through
a broken pane into a parlor
where guests once sat talking
of children and weather.

A teacup waits on the mantle.
Inside its porcelain hollow,
a trace of tea with honey
hardened by time.

On the peeling wall, a calendar
charts the vanished future.

In the kitchen, the mother
of God hangs crooked on a nail.



Artwork by Olena Kayinska

Who held the hammer?
Whose eyes sought the Virgin's?
Whose wood burned to ash
in the cold furnace?

Outside, a deer leaps the gate.
She noses the fruit in the grass
and feeds on the clover.
How history sounds:

her teeth tearing
the thick tufts of growth.
The same weed prospers
on the far hill,
among birch and stones
that bear the names
of the lucky ones, who died
in peace at home.

Bio note: Paul Jaskunas



Paul Jaskunas is the author of the novel *Hidden* (Free Press) and a novella, *The Atlas of Remedies* (forthcoming from Stillhouse Press). He teaches literature and creative writing at the Maryland Institute College of Art, where he edits the art journal *Full Bleed*. Since first traveling there on a Fulbright in 2001, he has spent several years living in Lithuania. His fiction, poetry, and journalism have appeared in numerous periodicals, including the *New York Times*, *America*, *Tab*, *the Windhover*, and the *Comstock Review*.

observations on the first day of spring

Lisa Schantl

I

the pin-wheel turns
violets, reds and yellows
in reverse order
freezing time
when the wind subsides

II

alder grows on balconies
like weed, soon
frying in bacon and emission
pale as the roofer, then
glazed leather

III

plucking daisies and worms
an orange beak swirls
peat across
the grass
leaves

IV



Photos by Dr. Helge Paulsen



from her kitchen starts
daringly into the wild
rooftop nursery the magnolia
sleeves rolled up
elbow high

V

glass echoes 1-2-3
and jazz guitar and chive and
parsley smells until
shadow falls and the clouds
rise not yet



I left you there

Lisa Schantl

with white lilies on your nightstand
growing distance
and dry tears running rivers
on hallway walls.

I spoke no goodbyes –
you could not.
The silence, a void
of sterile instruments and thin lips
motioning me to

walk straight
elevator
glass door



Photo by Gabor Sorok

away from you.

No goodbye would have done you justice anyways.

My tiny hands on your bed's rail
is the image that speaks instead.
The green curtain gaping –
my unstained eyes on you.

Your bloated white skin
sick from anesthesia and
whatever made air bubbles
blubber in translucent bags

– your still life

and my thoughts filled with endless whys
as you would and would not open your
mouth and would not open your

eyes and would not lift my hand from the rail
to tell me

“It’s alright.
Es wird scho wieda.
I bin jo fia di do.”

When the glass doors shattered
I did not turn around.
I obeyed.
I wish I could have left my hands

small on the rail with you.



Photo by Gabor Sorok

Bio note: Lisa Schantl



Lisa Schantl is the founder and editor-in-chief of *Tint Journal* and assistant at *treffpunkt sprachen* – Centre for Language, Plurilingualism and Didactics at the University of Graz. In addition, she freelances as cultural organizer and translator, and is interested in research on translingual literature. She holds university degrees in English and American Studies as well as Philosophy. Her work has appeared in *Asymptote*, *Versopolis*, *manuskripte*, *The Normal Review*, *UniVerse*, and more.

Agnese Rutkevica
in translation of Jayde Will

Having walked through the rainy province,
At the end of the day you sit down
Near the time-worn windowsill
And azaleas.
A life written down seems
Decent and beautiful.
While it rains, she remembers
That it's been a very very long
Time since she set her alarm.

She will always be beautiful
She is patient. She
Writes down the rain.

The end is a strange place.
Like a letter forgotten at the post office,
Which someone tries
To read with binoculars.

W. Szymborska Motif

No one feels good at four in the morning
she says and touches the blanket like a flag
under which it has become stifling
a fly buzzes in the dark, after waking up at that night hour
when there is nothing yet, just started and unfinished dreams
streets undisturbed by sudden steps
a square in the center of town
which was crossed by a lone passer-by in the dark
as the station's clock
looks at him
indifferently
damned to repeat
itself forever



Bio note: Agnese Rutkevica



Born in 1988, Agnese Rutkēviča, also known as Anna Foma, is a Latvian poet, writer, playwright, and actor. She has published two poetry collections—*Jaunā Vāgnera klusēšana* (The Silence of Young Wagner, 2013), *Vietām cilvēki* (Space for People, 2020), and the essay collection *Skumjais laikmets* (The Age of Sadness, 2022). She is currently working on her third book of poetry, *Attāluma mērvienības* (The Measurements of Distance). She lives in Valmiera.

Bio note: Jayde Will



Jayde Will is a writer and literary translator. Recent translations include Latvian poet Arvis Viguls's poetry collection *They* (Valley Press, 2020) Latvian writer Alberts Bels's novel *Insomnia* (Parthian 2020), and Estonian poet Maarja Pärtna's poetry collection *Vivarium* (The Emma Press, 2020). He lives in Riga.

Valentins Lukasevics
in translation of Jayde Will

Discord is a truce
Between the mind
And the heart
And when war comes
In shiny boots
It comes in
Only the best



Artwork by Igor Frolov

Bio note: Valentins Lukasevics



Valentins Lukaševičs is a Latgalian poet and writer. He is a former associate professor at Daugavpils University, where he taught Latgalian literature, among other subjects. His poetry collections, essay collections, and fiction have won or been nominated for several national awards. He lives in Daugavpils.

On the edge teetered the night

Giancarlo Castro Salas

For the past three decades,
 my blood has been clotting
 on the wrong side of my heart,
 and laughing behind my back
 a point of light has pierced my mind
 with the same cruelty as someone
 who's never loved.

Still some nights
 when I drink to get rid
 of the dust of others,
 shafts of light
 decorate whatever insight
 my spirit possesses.

I'd embrace you tightly then,
 forcing your flesh to renounce,
 tempting your shadow to bellow
 next to mine. But after joining
 our springs
 a tide blackened my dreams
 with its foam:

Beyond a glacier of clouds,
 I'd grab the moon by the crotch
 till its eyes eclipsed my lips
 and its guts liquefied my tongue,
 with such disdain, that the night
 teetering on its edge
 too, grew aroused

*

Young spirit,
 words do not expiate.
 The whole of language
 is just a candle burning
 posthumously
 its deceitful wax.

Bio note: Giancarlo Castro Salas



Giancarlo Castro Salas was born in Lima, Peru, and has been living in Germany for the past 10 years, currently in Frankfurt. He is a philosophy postgrad and is profoundly interested in ethics and psychoanalytic theory. Still, poetry is what nurtures his everyday life. He spends his days reading and writing.

Silences

Eva Ule
in translation of Tinkara V. Kastelic

All you've known
are my silences
in the rustling of sheets
of paper and plant twigs.
The rattling of teeth and bones seems
to be the bonfire of this tiny solitude
as it takes me to a frenzied landscape –
where in a constant patter
lingers the quiet symphony
and the duet of our silence.

river of dreams

you reek of the asphalt you were born in
bear this in mind as you wade through the river of dreams.



Photo by Gabor Sorok

Mornings fill tirelessly
 in the weight of your solitude,
 as the rags rot away
 and the woods melt into marsh
 and the pond disperses the night.
 Never will we reach nature
 or begin to grow green with grief,
 stretch our hands towards the light
 nor contrive the right words
 to convey
 just how awfully afraid I am
 that one day the mornings will
 no longer fill
 and your loud murmur alone
 will remain –

like a pebble
 thawing into the sea.

Bio note: Tinkara Vukadinović Kastelic

Tinkara Vukadinović Kastelic (2001) is a graduate translator in Slovenian, English and French (Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana). She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Plurilingualism and Interculturalism at the University of Strasbourg, France. She publishes her texts on various cultural platforms, mainly *Koridor KU* and *LUD Literatura*, and has also collaborated with the newspaper *Delo* (2021) as part of the Mlado pero project. Since 2020, she has been working with the Centre for Language Resources and Technologies at UL (CJVT UL) in the field of Slovenian linguistics and lexicography.

Bio note: Eva Ule


Eva Ule (2001) is a student of Slovene Language and Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. She publishes her poems and other texts in various Slovenian literary magazines, such as *Literatura*, *Nebulae*, *Mentor*, *Zvon*, and on online platforms, mainly on *LUD Literatura* and *Koridor–križišča umetnosti*. Her poetry has been published in the international anthology *Rukopisi 43* and in the online magazine *Poetryzine*. Currently she is one of the literary editors of the online platform *Koridor–križišča umetnosti*.

Where Are They Now? Meet Some of the Contributors from Our Past Issues

In our past issues, we've had the honor of publishing an interesting collection of short stories, poetry, and essays from contributors scattered all across our region, some native and others who moved here. As we publish our 10th issue, we wanted to catch up with some of our former contributors and find out their stories: where are they now and how is the writing going.

Matthew Daintrey-Hall used to live in Budapest and published his short story "City of Smiles" in issue #1 of Panel.

Where are you now?

I moved from Budapest to Nairobi in Kenya in 2020 - in the middle of the pandemic!

What's been going on in your writing life since you published your piece with Panel?

One big thing was adapting the story Panel published ('City of Smiles') into a screenplay for a short film. It was amazing working under the supervision of a renowned director to develop the story into something visual. Unfortunately, we didn't get funding to put it into production, but the experience was still great! I've also completed the novel I started in Budapest in 2018 — only to discover it was actually three novels!

What's exciting in your life right now?

Now just finishing the first volume in that trilogy, 'If Not, The Intensified Sky' — a complete overhaul of what had been the first 100 pages, now a much more dramatic and eventful 300 pages! I've also had lots of film education work recently published, including a history of LGBTQ+ lives in silent film. This month, I also have an article about what real Africans think of the 'Black Panther' movie franchise (spoiler: they don't like it!) being published in *MediaMagazine UK*.

What's your next project?

Completing the current novel before Christmas: making sure the timeline adds up, people don't change their name spellings halfway through...and ensuring it all makes sense and is actually fun to read!

Artem Serebriakov published his short story, "The Black One," translated into English from Russian in issue #2 of Panel.

Where are you now?

Despite the advice from my colleagues and friends to leave the country that started a horrible war, I am still at my home in St. Petersburg. I chose to stay here in the city that I love very much as I continue to study and teach philosophy, trying to bring some sense of togetherness and hope to people around me.

What's been going on in your writing life since you published your piece with Panel?

A couple of years ago, my second book was published a novel called *Fistula*. It was noticed by some critics and got a little bit of press. After that, I've only managed to publish two short stories in

anthologies, both among much more respected authors, which is probably a good thing for my texts. I still don't consider myself a proper writer, only a failed one — the amount of work that I did not finish (and never will) is, truly, something to be proud of.

What's exciting in your life right now?

Considering the events of this year, the most exciting things in life can be listed as follows:

- 1) there is no nuclear war (yet);
- 2) neither my loved ones nor myself are in jail (yet);
- 3) I was not targeted for military conscription (yet);
- 4) there are still many people in my country who are genuinely good, caring, peaceful and thoughtful — and this means there is still a lot to fight for (and always will be).



What's your next goal?

I am trying to finish my dissertation on philosophy of childhood without going insane. Plus, there are multiple ideas for fiction that I still haven't failed to realize.

Berlin-based Brandon Killbourne published his poem "Otepää Snowscape" in issue #5 of Panel.

Where are you now?

I am still in Berlin, working at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin (Museum of Natural History Berlin).

What's been going on in your writing life since you published your piece with Panel?

I guess my writing life has been going well. Since publishing in Panel, I have published in *Ecotone*,

Poet Lore, *West Trade Review*, *Artemis*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, *The Fourth River*, and *Slant*, with another poem slated to appear in *Obsidian* I think in 2024. I was also nominated for a Pushcart Prize by *Ecotone* in 2021. I actually do have some more Berlin/Tallinn pieces in the back of my mind, so I need to also submit again to Panel in the near future!

But there is one exciting thing that happened as a direct result from publishing in Panel—My poem "Otepää Snowscape" was translated into Estonian in the cultural magazine *Sirp*. So that was pretty amazing, and then after that, the Estonian newspaper *Postimees*, got wind of me and then had a small article on me. I'm fond of Estonia, so it was amazing to have this sort of cultural exchange with Estonians.

What's exciting in your life right now?



Less than a month ago, I was invited to Vancouver to give a reading of my poem "Natural History, the Curious Institution" to open a plenary session on Indigenous perspectives at the Joint Annual Meeting of the Entomological Societies of America, Canada, and British Columbia. The poem examines the reality that early naturalists in Europe used slave ships and the transatlantic slave trade to bring specimens from Africa and the Americas back to Europe. I originally read this poem as for Black in Natural History Museums, a week-long series of online events that highlights Black professionals working in natural history museums. One of the panel members for that event heard me read the poem, and then invited me to read the poem in Vancouver. It was a fantastic opportunity to share my work with a community that traditionally is not associated with poetry, and I was also beside

myself to open a session including two great talks on Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. The registered attendance for the meeting was about 3500 people, and I think the room was half full when I read, so it was by the biggest audience I've ever shared my poetry with!

Work-wise, for the last six months, I've been part of the organizing team for TheMuseumsLab, a science diplomacy program that is partly run out of the museum here in Berlin in combination with other organizations. The program brings together museum professionals from African and European museums for dialogues, joint learning, and perspective exchanges on topics such as colonialism and restitution/repatriation, as well as for a broad discussion of what does equity entail in the global museum-sphere, and how should museums



serve society in the 21st century. It's been a lot of fun to be part of this program, and it feels great to work on a project that I think has an impact beyond strict science, which brings me to the answer to your next question...

What's your next goal?

My major goal right now is trying to find a way to bring the humanities and sciences together in different projects. In line with this goal, one project that I am just starting to explore is a literary journal based out of the natural history museum here. The focus of the journal would be natural history related, including (de)colonialism and colonialism's links to museum collections, the Anthropocene, inclusive of climate change and the threat to biodiversity, and the natural world more broadly. We are thinking of having poetry, fiction, essays, creative nonfiction, and

visual art, and it would be great if we could get contributions from both artists and scientists. There is a humanities dept here at the museum in Berlin, so this is what inspires me to give this a shot in a natural history museum. Right now, we're trying to figure out if the journal will be online only, how many issues will come out a year, the feasibility of taking on a journal's work in addition to our actual work, etc. So really looking at the initial logistics, but hopefully this really gets off the ground and materializes into something!

Christie Goodwin was based in Budapest when she published her poems "Illinois" and "The Sabbatical" in issue #4.

Where are you now?

I recently graduated from Boston University with an MFA in Poetry.

During my time at BU, I started collaborating with the artist Stephen Proski; he created prints based on my poems, and I wrote poems based on his artwork. The collaboration will be published as a chapbook, "Oracle Smoke Machine", by Staircase Books next year.

After graduating, I travelled to Sicily as a Robert Pinsky Global Fellow where I started working on a novel in verse. The university also awarded my poem, "One Night Only," an Academy of American Poets Prize.

Where are you now?

I am living in the Old Town of Riga, and observing the ebb and flow of locals and tourists from my second-story window, from the relative quiet of the daytime hours to the party-hard evenings, nights, and not-so-early mornings. When someone is kind of yelling and kind of singing at the same time at 4 AM, and you have a bird's-eye view of things, you realize how absurd life can look when you're not at street-level.

What's been going on in your writing life since you published your piece with Panel?

I have published short stories, essays, and some poetry, mostly in Latvian and Lithuanian publications in either Latvian translation from the original English, or also texts that were originally written in Latvian or

Jayde Will has been a regular contributor to Panel since issue #3. We've published his original poem "Nazdravi" and his translation of work by Albert Bels in issue #3, his translations of Latvian flash fiction and poetry for issue #5, and translations of Latgalian and Latvian poetry for issue #7.



Lithuanian. Though I might not write every day, I have been writing more regularly, as there are ideas that have been germinating for some time, and now I feel I need to write down these ideas. Sometimes I think a good while before actually putting pen to paper, but it is not a hard and fast rule. Prompts can often be a driving force to write new texts, especially poetry.

What's exciting in your life right now?

I recently wrote an introductory article about the three Baltic countries for an Italian lifestyle magazine that has an issue coming out about the region (sometime in the next couple months, from what I understand). It has always been tough to come up with an easy-to-digest framework for such articles, and I have tried several times in the past, but I was always dissatisfied

with the result. I finally feel I came up with something suitable AND informative. No easy task. And as it was a relatively lengthy piece, I did hit upon a few topics I did not use in that particular article, but which I might pursue for other publications.

What's your next project?

I have been working on several essays dealing with fears. One of them is being translated into Latvian and will appear in a literary journal next year, and I am currently gathering material for a few other essays.

Anastasiia Denysenko is a Ukrainian poet and writer based in Budapest. She published her poem "The Beauty of Innocence" in Issue #8 and her essay "The Skies of Volnovakha" in issue #9.

Where are you now?

I am still living in Budapest, studying at the university, currently in my 2nd year. I recently moved to Buda side, I finally live on my own, and I am planning to adopt a kitten at the beginning of the new year. Nothing new, the same place, but still so much love. I don't think I will ever move away.

What's been going on in your writing life since you published your piece with Panel?

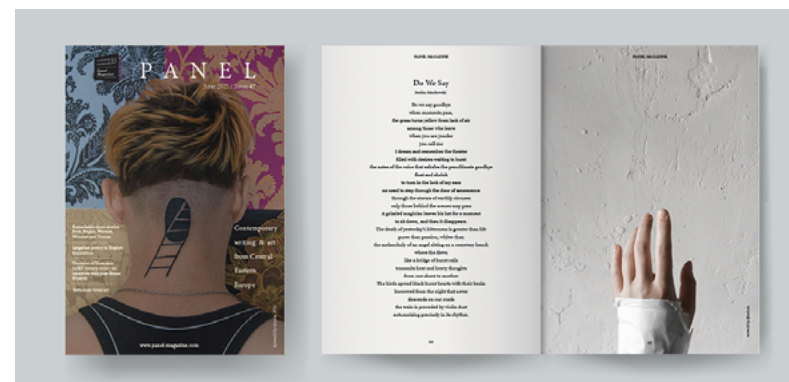
Actually, after publishing a piece about my hometown "The Skies of Volnovakha", I haven't been writing a lot in English. Surprisingly, I came back to writing in Ukrainian. I haven't been submitting my work anywhere, but I am still continuing to write about the war, and other things, too. It has been a sad and exciting journey.

What's exciting in your life right now?

In January, I am starting a memoir writing workshop by Matt Henderson Ellis. I have never participated in anything like this, so I am really excited. And a bit nervous, of course. I always wanted to try writing prose more professionally, and I think it is the perfect chance to start.

What's your next project?

As of now, I want to focus on the workshop and also proceed writing war poetry in Ukrainian for Ukrainians. I really want to do something with Ukrainian refugees here in Budapest, but haven't found the right idea yet. Maybe, a writing workshop or something like this that would help them work through the trauma. And I am also focusing on my studies, of course. So, let's say my next project is trying to



make the most out of everything I have. And write, write, write.

Mitchell Atkinson is an American writer based in Warsaw, Poland, and has written for Panel multiple times, with his first short story "Matador" appearing in issue #4. We also recently published his non-fiction piece "Defending" in issue #9.

Where are you now?

I am at the time of this writing in Warsaw, Poland. In a few days, I will be in Abu Dhabi.

What's been going on in your writing life since you published your piece with Panel?

Since publishing with Panel, I have finished my PhD defense and secured a position teaching academic writing at university. I've completed a semester of work

and come to know a few dozen eighteen-year-olds of the current generational crop. Unlike many, I am optimistic for the future. Or perhaps "optimistic" is not quite the word. I'll say that hope comes gently; I needn't fuss to find it. I have also visited the United States of America for the first time since September 2019. I consider myself an American not least because there seem to be no other considerations on offer. I am worried about my country. I fear a strange desperation is growing there, and that the growth has turned quick. This desperation, as a social phenomenon, may have a structure which is historically novel. If so, it will be poorly understood. I don't know what happens when a people, in its entirety, is haunted by abundance, listlessness, and other ghosts.

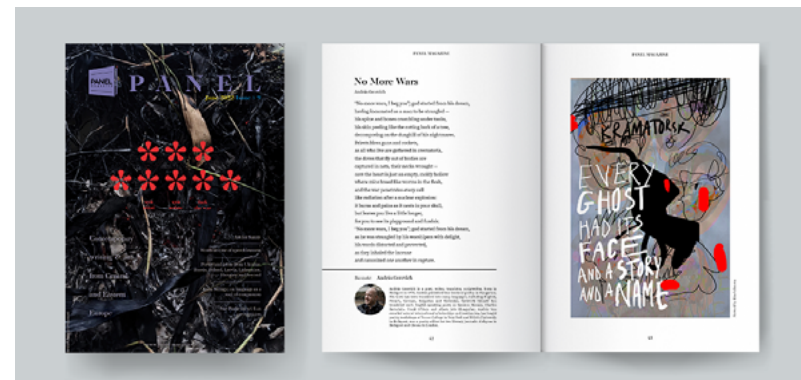
I also purchased a necktie, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for four US dollars.

What's exciting in your life right now?

The necktie, referred to above, was purchased across town from my brother's house, which is a century old, is (partially) heated by a giant, black-iron fireplace, and has a post out front where one might hitch one's horse. There is a large dog there, who taught me how to play fetch.

What's your next goal?

I am trying now to get my dissertation book published, and I have some contacts which could see me through. The novel I wrote last year is either more boring or more controversial than I thought. It seems that literary agents doubt its saleability. I am working now on an academic text on contemporary reactions to sublime phenomena and a novel, the working title of which is the name of a popular snack.



Stories of the Roma

Jennifer Walker

I read an article in a literary journal once that said, “To understand the Roma, you need to read their stories.” It fascinated me, and although the Roma people live throughout Eastern Europe, I’ve heard little about them beyond the negative stereotypes and racism that prevail across much of this part of the world. I had the idea to cover Roma writers and their stories for a while, but finding work translated into English was quite a challenge. There are books by Roma writers, mostly from places like Ireland, that fell outside the scope of this journal. I found a classic novel written by a Hungarian Roma translated into English, a memoir by a woman of Russian-Romani descent, and a piece of fiction about a Romani poet in Slovakia but written by an Irish writer. It’s an area I’d like to uncover more in my literary journey. Hopefully, it will pique your interest in finding Roma stories to read and explore to understand this misunderstood and marginalized community that plays a vital role in Central and Eastern Europe.



Zoli

Colum McCann (Random House, 2001)

I had reservations about reading a novel written by an Irish man about a Romani woman. Still, McCann’s fiction inspired by the life of Papusza, a Polish-Romani poet who lived from 1910 to 1987, is a fascinating work of fiction. The novel is split into several points of view, but it is mainly told from the point of view of “Zoli,” a Romani woman poet in the 1950s. After the Nazis killed her parents, she traveled with her grandfather and her community as a child until her talent was recognized by renowned poet Martin Stransky and Irish-Slovak ex-pat Stephen Swann. She became a minor celebrity in communist-era Czechoslovakia for her poetry, before her community expelled her and declared her unclean for sharing their secrets in her books. Zoli wandered Europe isolated from her own people, starting from Slovakia and eventually reaching Italy. The story is also told from the point of view of Swann, a journalist; however, Zoli is the core figure of the novel. Her voice is unique, poetic, free, and sensitive. McCann clearly had researched the life of the Romani of this period and the life of Papusza (although Zoli’s life is fictionalized, as there are many differences, like the novel’s dates). The book examines how white “savior” figures like Stransky and Swann, along with the Communist regime, had used Zoli, discarding her when she was no longer useful to them. The contrast between the voices who exoticize and even romanticize Zoli and her people and Zoli herself is fascinating, mainly because the author writes Zoli’s voice and perspective with such care and sensitivity. It’s a compelling, well-researched novel that is deftly written. It provides a good stepping stone for the casual reader to discover other books and poems by Roma authors.



The Color of Smoke: An Epic Novel of the Roma

Menyhért Lakatos (New Europe Books, 2015)

Translated by Ann Major

This magnum opus by Hungary’s most acclaimed Romani author is a dense read that you may struggle to speed through. Still, it’s a sensational story about the Romani community in early 20th-century Hungary right up until the Nazi Holocaust, and it is worth taking the time to savor the details. It’s a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story narrated from the point of view of a nameless protagonist. It charts his life from childhood in a shantytown the community named “Gypsy Paris,” where he grows up listening to his grandmother recount her former nomadic existence in the former Austro-Hungarian empire, to his time in school and adventures with his friend Bada and his entanglements with other Romani girls. There is also a dark undercurrent simmering in the background; the Nazi occupation of Hungary encloses the Roma and pushes them into further marginalization, culminating in the final, moving yet harrowing chapter of a desperate community duped into getting on a train believing they are headed for a better future. It’s a fascinating account of the Romani community in early 20th-century Hungary, beautifully written and colorfully peppered with words from the Romani language and its traditions.



American Gypsy

Oksana Marafioti (FSG Originals, 2012)

This engaging memoir brings us to the early 21st century. Oksana comes from a mixed background of Romani, Armenian, Greek, and Ukrainian heritage. She identifies as Roma due to her Romani father and the nomadic life she leads as she grows up with a community of Romani musicians in Russia. Oksana recounts her youth traveling around the former Soviet Union with her father and mother until they moved to the United States, to Los Angeles, when her parents split. Afterward, her father brought over his Romani lover, a fortune teller from Russia called Olga, to live with them. After Oksana’s mother moves to Las Vegas, Oksana chooses to stay with her father for her school in LA and navigates life as a teenager not just as a Russian immigrant but also as someone Roma. She struggles with her identity as she tries to fit in as an American. At the same time, her father wants her to marry another Romani boy and learn to tell fortunes and learn the arts of the occult that both he and his partner Olga partake in for money. One scene that sticks with me is when her father forces her to sit in on an exorcism he performs in their home. Oksana’s father dismisses her passion for music as she is not a man, believing she should instead learn to tell fortunes like Olga to make money and continue the Romani tradition. Although America offers Oksana the freedom and opportunity to follow her dreams in a way that was not possible back in Russia, she still faces the challenge of breaking away from her family and community’s traditions and expectations. “American Gypsy” is an unusual contemporary memoir—it’s surreal, well-written, and compelling.

Contributors

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 Suzanne Hermanoczki
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 Giancarlo Castro Salas
 Lisa Schantl
 Ákos Szolcsányi
 Eva Ule
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 Jayde Will
 Imola Eva Zsitva

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Artists

Gábor Sorok

A Budapest based photographer and painter. In his work, he seeks to understand the sensuality and physicality of the human body while answering the question of what it is to be human. His greatest inspiration is the human body itself.

Olena Kayinska

Artist from Lviv, Ukraine.

Olena Kayinska is from Lviv, Ukraine. She started drawing after graduating from university and after a period of spiritual self-discovery. In 2012, she finished her first large-format painting, and realized she loved painting more than anything else.

In 2016 she participated in her first collective exhibition The Journey for Inner Light. Since then, Olena has participated in numerous group and personal exhibitions. Olena Kayinska participated in the recent Panel's multimedia exhibition "Layers of Sense."

Vika Ovechkina

Vika Ovechkina was born in Kupyansk. In 2020, she moved to Kharkiv and enrolled in the State art college there. In March 2022, Vika was evacuated to Krakow, Poland, where she has continued her studies while painting and working as a volunteer. Vika Ovechkina participated in the recent Panel's multimedia exhibition "Layers of Sense."

Maria Gyarmati

Interactive media and visual artist. She creates art that integrates dance performance, extended reality, and combines classical art techniques with new media art.

Exploring topics: psychology, social catastrophes, opportunities and level of awareness of people at the present moment of history. She has participated in numerous group and personal exhibitions.

Igor Frolov

Igor Frolov is an artist, glassblower and painter. Originally from the Republic of Karelia, he currently lives and works in Kotor, Montenegro. The project included in this exhibition was previously displayed in Montenegro. Igor Frolov participated in the recent Panel's multimedia exhibition "Layers of Sense."

Weronika Wrzosek

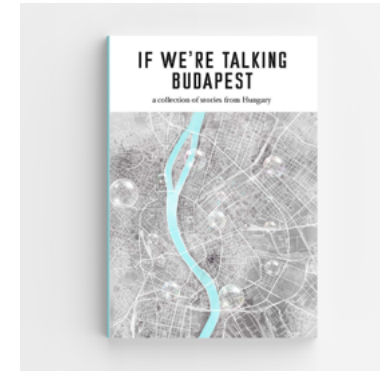
Polish artist and designer. As an inspiration she uses issues known mainly from medieval and baroque art. She works in the field of artistic installation and painting, as well as designing clothes, costumes and fabrics. It deals with the subject of passing, the materiality of decay, disinformation, destruction, alienation, loneliness and excess in the contemporary world.

Dr. Helge Paulsen

Dr. Helge Paulsen works as a freelance writer and photographer. His focus is artistic photography. His works exhibit in galleries and magazines. Artpromotor.com is his home base.

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