

Mountainish

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trans. *Katy Derbyshire*

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*Incredible how differently mountains are seen.  
Ski slopes, investment opportunities, holiday regions,  
hunting grounds, places for climbing expeditions  
up to the sky, ursine paradise.*

A narrator and her dog are criss-crossing the Swiss Alps. She travels with friends who share her interest in food, languages and their topographical contexts. They collect colours, even look for colourlessness, and develop the idea of a walk-in diary, a vain attempt to archive their observations, encompassing portraits, descriptions and ruminations on mountains, hotels, people, language, food, flora and fauna.

Gradually, other mountains appear in their observations and memories, as do the mountains of literature and art. Mountains may be sites of fear and awe, of narrow-mindedness, racism and ever-looming collapse; Alpine lodges may be places of hospitality, retreat and unexpected encounters; of nature under threat.

In 515 notes, Zsuzsanna Gahse unfolds a finely woven interplay between her six characters while giving us a vivid panorama of mountain worlds, a multi-layered typology of all things mountainish.



Zsuzsanna Gahse, born in Budapest in 1946, has lived in Vienna, Kassel, Stuttgart and Lucerne, and is now based in Müllheim (Switzerland). Her literary work moves between prose and poetry, narrative and scenic texts. She has published more than thirty books, most recently *Bergisch teils farblos* (2021) and *Zeilenweise Frauenfeld* (2023), both with Edition Korrespondenzen in Vienna. A number of her stage projects have also been performed. She was awarded the Johann Heinrich Voss Prize of the German Academy in Darmstadt for her translations from Hungarian to German in 2010, and the Swiss Grand Prix for Literature in 2019.



Katy Derbyshire, originally from London, has lived in Berlin for over 20 years. She translates contemporary German writers, including Inka Parei, Heike Geissler, Olga Grjasnowa, Annett Gröschner and Christa Wolf. Her translation of Clemens Meyer's *Bricks and Mortar* was the winner of the 2018 Straelener Übersetzerpreis (Straelen Prize for Translation), longlisted for the Man Booker International Prize 2017, and shortlisted for the 2019 Best Translated Book Awards. She occasionally teaches translation and co-hosts a monthly translation lab and the bi-monthly Dead Ladies Show. She helped to establish the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation, awarded annually since 2017.

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## PRAISE FOR *MOUNTAINISH*

‘Some writers aspire to build castles in the air, but Zsuzsanna Gahse dares to deconstruct far more fundamental geological edifices. In *Mountainish* she approaches – through a series of impressionistic fragments – a distinctly individual understanding of altitude and terrain. Cliches crumble to reveal startling new vistas. A generous and perceptive gathering of kaleidoscopic observations on landscape and the languages that echo through them. Katy Derbyshire’s translation is clear as air at 15,000 feet.’  
— Nancy Campbell

‘In *Mountainish*, Gahse directs her reader through 515 notes, making it clear with great elegance and wit that an escape to the mountains is not an escape from the self; that the unconscious is bound to landscape and reverberations; that words haunt like ghosts; that the echo of self cannot be avoided. Each note is a story and each mountain or what is like a mountain is a language; it is a matter of orientation. I have marked the pages of this brilliant book as though it were an atlas. It is a place to which I am compelled to return, even if I might be smashed apart.’  
— Sharon Kivland

‘*Mountainish* is an idiosyncratic book – an unusual combination of intellectual speculation, delicate observation, and sustained flippancy. In Zsuzsanna Gahse’s Alps you might find a group of buses doing a dance routine or a new theory of language; friends discussing cave art or an unfortunate donkey plunging to her death.’  
— Daisy Hildyard

Somewhere in the Swiss Alps – amidst rock, scree, lakes and caves, between ochre and red, and in the place where vowels fly through the mountain skies – lies *Mountainish*. Zsuzsanna Gahse’s observations, at once sharp and supple, challenge us to look, to listen – to look and listen all over again. I loved it!’  
— Amy Arnold

‘Zsuzsanna Gahse reflects on questions of perception, language, art and the digital world. Mountains are dissected and even playfully moved like chess pieces. Words also wander, change their sound, are smoothed, plastered and hollowed out. Gahse criticises the illusion of a ‘pristine’, clean homeland and opens up the view.’  
— Jens-Peter Kusch, *Viceversa Literatur*

‘Gahse collects portraits of people and regions, is interested in colours and colour changes, things and their names, languages, language changes and the disappearance of languages, the economic conditions in mountain regions, tourism and much more. The presentation is a kaleidoscope of mountain landscapes and disparate things.’  
— Oswald Burger, *Südkurier*

## ABOUT PROTOTYPE

Founded in 2019, Prototype is a publisher of fiction, poetry, anthologies and interdisciplinary projects. With an emphasis on producing unique and beautiful books, we are committed to creating new possibilities in publishing and championing the work of new and established voices in contemporary literature.

Recent fiction titles include *The Seers* by Sulaiman Addonia, *Lori & Joe* by Amy Arnold, shortlisted for the Goldsmiths Prize, Jen Calleja’s acclaimed novel *Vehicle*, shortlisted for the Short Fiction/University of Essex Prize, and Yuri Felsen’s lost modernist novel *Deceit*, in its first English translation by Bryan Karetnyk. House Sparrow Press, an imprint of Prototype, published Derek Jarman’s sole piece of narrative fiction, *Through the Billboard Promised Land Without Ever Stopping*, in 2022. Recent poetry titles include *Virgula*, the award-winning collection by Dutch poet Sasja Janssen, in translation by Michele Hutchison, *Incubation: a space for monsters* by Bhanu Kapil, in its first UK edition, and Lavinia Singer’s collection *Artifice*.