



Eurozine Review

Index on Censorship traces diasporic lives; *Samtiden* hands the pen to the outsider; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Berlin) looks behind the building sites in Kurdistan; *Rigas Laiks* finds madness on a monumental scale; *FA-art* seeks the subject in Polish poetry and fiction; *Dialogi* discusses the relationship between culture and government; and *Sodobnost* reads literature in the context of globalization.

Index on Censorship 2/2006



In 2002, Ekow Eshun, the British-born Ghanaian and artistic director of the London ICA, travelled to his parents' homeland to find an answer to the familiar question: "Where are you from?" But the resulting book, *The Black Gold of the Sun: Searching for home in England and Africa* (2005) is a long way from the "homecoming" narrative of Alex Haley's *Roots*, writes the author in *Index on Censorship*.

In the course of research, Eshun made a disconcerting discovery: that Ghana had a thriving slave trade long before the arrival of the Europeans and that some of his ancestors, part-Dutch part-Ghanaian, had themselves been traders. Far from getting away from the myth of European superiority that still resonated in the Britain of Eshun's youth, he found himself at its core.

"Even when you go to Africa, as I did, seeking home, it turns out that there isn't purity there: it turns out that history is predicated on miscegenation, culturally, racially, in all sorts of ways. In the end, that realization forms the path to a particular freedom, because to understand this is to acknowledge that identity isn't determined by singularity, by blood or history or point of origin. It's determined by choice."

Also in "Parallel lives" — a focus on the diasporic experience — author Harold Jacobsen speculates on what two very different superheroes have in common. Abandoned as a child then rescued by strangers, a foreigner among his people, in possession of awesome powers but with a fatal weakness: was Moses the model for Superman?

"Superman's sadness [...] is diaspora sadness, a function of his homelessness, of his isolation, of his having to perpetuate himself endlessly in good deeds. But above all it is of a piece with his vulnerability to kryptonite, that poisonous mineral left-over of the planet Krypton, the briefest contact with which will deprive him of those powers which have become his only reason for existence. In this, Superman's susceptibility to kryptonite is comparable to Moses's stutter — the mark of his foreignness [...] Approach Superman with kryptonite and he

is once again Kal–El, the boy with the Kabbalic name, the boy from the shtetl."

Also to look out for: film–maker and journalist Sarfraz Manzoor on risky writing: "Journalism works by having a fresh top line [...] the only things that get commissioned are things that are provocative, that tend to the counterintuitive argument [...] There is a cynicism in the commissioning process and I find that depressing."

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Samtiden 2/2006



Knut Olav Åmås aimed high when he took on the position as editor of Norway's oldest cultural journal five years ago: *Samtiden* was to become a leading feeder for the Norwegian public debate, alongside the big newspapers and national television channels. Now, as Åmås publishes his last issue as *Samtiden* editor, one can say that he succeeded. Almost every issue of *Samtiden* to appear during the last five years triggered debates that spread far beyond the covers of the journal and drew public attention to conflicts and problems usually only discussed in closed circles.

This issue will hardly be an exception. Several of the contributions to the main theme on "social casualties" have been written by outsiders. Halvar D. Pettersen, a convict at the Ila high–security prison, describes solitary confinement as a form of "torture without blood": "The seriousness of the situation cannot be stressed enough", wrote the European Council Commission for the Prevention of Torture after meeting prisoners in solitary confinement at the Norwegian prison Ringerike. What is actually going on when, in Norway in the year 2006, people labelled enemies of society are turned into vegetables and suicide candidates? Is it all just based on a misunderstanding or do the authorities know perfectly well what they are doing?"

Under the title "Report from the life of an expert", Nina Stoltenberg tells of her long–time experience as a heroine addict on the streets of Oslo. And Olav Hellum describes the social isolation he has faced after blowing the whistle on the Norwegian health care system: "Life has turned into a shop window. I am standing on the outside looking in. The logic of a criminal or an outcast becomes more and more understandable: you cannot feel responsible for something you are not allowed to belong to."

Theatre and art: theatre critic Therese Bjørneboe on international stagings of Henrik Ibsen, whose 175th birthday is also being celebrated extensively outside Norway; and art critic Øystein Ustvedt on the "new" abstract painting that during the last decades has found a solid basis in Norway.

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Le Monde diplomatique (Berlin) 5/2006



"We'll just go and live in Kurdistan, under our own flag, speaking our own language in freedom. Rather than being humiliated here, made to feel like criminals and always exposed to violence because we are Kurds, we'll just go across the mountains and get to Kurdistan," say a group of young men living in Semdinli, a small town in southeast Turkey. In the German edition of *Le Monde diplomatique*, journalist Ece

Temelkuran [explores](#) the dreamland of Kurdistan, where fear and violence are being calmed by building sites.

Through cooperation with the US, the area is being developed. But this cooperation is not only a blessing — it is also "a political burden and a burden of conscience for both Kurds in Turkey and those in Iraq", writes Temelkuran. "As the building sites progress and the Middle Eastern dust stirred up by the war begins to settle, questions are starting to be asked. Is it possible to found a land of dreams together with those who have shattered every last dream in the Middle East? What are the Kurds, the accursed of the Middle East, going to do?"

On Africa: "The history of Africa is a history of colliding cultures, marked by the maelstrom of wars, by invasions, migrations, intermarriages, by dogmas that are adopted, by technology that is exchanged, by goods that are traded," [writes](#) historian Achille Mbembe. "The cultural history of the continent is practically incomprehensible without the paradigm of itinerancy, mobility, and translocation." This movement both within and between continents has been connected with an "Afropolitanism" that has transcended rigid African nationalism through curiosity for the foreign and openness to hybridity.

Also to look out for: historian Christopher Alan Bayly on Europe's dominance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which, he [argues](#), was based not only on industrialization and the development of nation-states with imperial scopes, but also, more importantly, on a combination of economic and political factors that did not coincide anywhere else at the time.

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Rigas Laiks 5/2006



"The state of Israel was founded thanks to a single woman who managed to find money for it", David Ben-Gurion once said about Golda Meir, the first (and to date only) female Prime Minister of Israel (1969–1974), and the third female Prime Minister in the world. Ilmars Zvirgzds (University of Latvia) traces Golda Meir's biography from her traditional Jewish upbringing in Kiev to the role she played in world

history — which was often controversial. Her successor as head of state, Yitzhak Rabin, pointed out that during her tenure an opportunity for a peaceful agreement with the Palestinians was missed. No wonder, when one hears how the "Iron Lady" of Israeli politics characterized her policy as cabinet leader: "There is no such thing as a Palestinian people."

Zurab Tsereteli, portrayed in the issue with an interview by Anita Admine, is another monumentalist, albeit of quite a different sort. The Russo-Georgian painter, sculptor, and architect is not only President of the Russian Academy of Arts but also creator of the second and third largest statues in the world. Some

of Moscow's art critics disdainfully refer to the statue of Peter the Great (96 metres high), which was moved from St Petersburg to Moscow after protests by citizens in 1997, as "Moscow's Godzilla". Currently, Tsereteli's "Tear of Grief", a monument to the victims of 9/11, is being constructed in New Jersey across the river from the destroyed Twin Towers.

Ideological symbolism, corporate links, and southern temperament have combined to create an atrocious cultural phenomenon, which has assumed the role of a substitute for art in the public sphere. Nevertheless, the simulacrum of totalitarian art has given rise to numerous outbursts of social consciousness: Moscow intellectuals thwarted Tsereteli's attempt to erect a monument to Brodsky, and Crimean Tatars in Yalta announced their intention to blow up not only the bronze Stalin but also the sculptor himself if his plan to build the homage to the 1944 Yalta conference with Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill sitting side by side on a bench was ever realized.

Also to look out for: an interview with Peter Singer. The wealthy patrons of Princeton University let it be known that they would cut funding for the philosophy department if the animal rights and social activist, utilitarian, and philosopher were hired. Singer was hired and funding was cut. Elsewhere, Jason Potter on Charles Bukowski's rough message. Daiga Mazversite on the Latvian pop singer Zigfrids Racins. And the Latvian translation of Andrej Dynko's letter from prison.

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FA-art 62 (4/2005)



In the latest issue of the Polish literary quarterly *FA-art*, Anna Kaluza examines the notion of the human subject in the poetry of Julia Hartwig. One of the leading representatives of the older generation of Polish poets, Hartwig promotes the humanist vision of culture. At the same time, she is deeply rooted in the Cartesian tradition of rationalism. The combination of these two currents has made Hartwig an advocate of poetry that balances emotion with intellect.

This attitude seems to explain the poet's traditional treatment of the human being as a harmonious, logical, and conscientious subject, embedded in the Greek concept of *ego*. However, as Kaluza points out, Hartwig's poetry is more nuanced. One of the goals of a poet is to achieve the unity between language and the world, between word and object. Her poems are therapeutic and affirmative of quasi-divine laws that guide human existence. Unlike Nobel Prize winner Wislawa Szymborska, who is extremely critical of the metaphysical-idealistic tradition in poetry, Hartwig fully endorses classical lyricism.

Kaluza's reading of Hartwig corresponds in part with Krzysztof Unilowski's discussion of subject, conscience, and identity in contemporary Polish prose, poetry, and essay writing. The postmodernist tendency to de-personalize human subjects and to emphasize protagonists' relationship to "the Other" has revolutionized traditional grand historical narratives as well as various literary conventions. Thus, in his debut novel *Who Was David Weiser*, Pawel Huelle projects the story of a Jewish boy and his gentile friends and enemies alike by employing evangelical motives from the New Testament. And Andrzej

Stasiuk, self-declared outsider and the bard of provincial and forsaken localities spreading from Poland to Albania, confronts the intellectual and cultural norms of the intelligentsia with those of ordinary folk.

Yet, as Unilowski is quick to observe, these authors have merely replaced one set of myths with another. In this respect, contemporary Polish literature is less iconoclastic than it might seem: it continues to be intellectual entertainment and does not shy away from engaging society, albeit in a more self-ironic mould than its predecessors.

Also to look out for: a short essay on "Generation XP2" by Roman Ksiszek, in which he examines the cultural and linguistic construction of the "John Paul II generation", a term adopted by the media after the death of the last pope to identify a section of Polish youth.

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Dialogi 3-4/2006



On the occasion of the Preseren Awards — the Slovene national prize for culture — a neoliberal economist suggested that the artists receiving prizes should pay for them themselves, since culture is not marketable. This debate has provoked editor Boris Vezjak to discuss the relations between cultural actors in Slovenia and government authorities in his editorial for the latest issue of *Dialogi*. Later in the issue, the

Romantic poet France Preseren is again the focus, when the new *Dialogi* arts editor Breda Kolar Sluga reviews a book that includes all known posthumous portraits of the most famous Slovene poet.

Dramaturge, editor, and translator Alja Predan talks in an interview about Slovene dramatic productions, the relation between theatre and society today, and the position of the dramaturge in Slovene theatre. Her opinion is well expressed in the title of the interview: "Society is no longer reflected in theatre".

In a piece on the literature of Russian avant-gardist Daniil Charms, philosopher Karolina Babic uses Freud's "uncanny" to explain the urge to laugh about Charms's absurd stories. Elsewhere, literary scholar Gizela Polanc-Podpecan analyzes two works by Slovene authors Florjan Lipus and Dane Zajc, both thematizing violent death due to ideology, connecting past to present generations.

In the literary section, poet and translator Venko Taufer presents three contemporary Armenian poets: Gevorg Emin, Henrik Edojan, and Violeta Grigorjan. And Vinko Möderndorfer, one of the most renowned contemporary novelists, artists, and filmmakers in Slovenia, publishes a new short story.

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Sodobnost 4/2006



"Poet, do you know your debt?" asks Tone Persak, president of the Slovene PEN Centre, referring to the fear that in the process of globalization, our ability to perceive art is being changed in a dangerous way. He writes about the marginalization of literature in a globalized world, the topic of the 38th international PEN conference in Bled, Slovenia, last March. Persak concludes that globalization is a double-edged sword, taking away with the left hand what it gives with the right. The global dissemination of ideas about human rights and the rights of women is offset by the tendency of global market forces to reshape all of us in line with the capitalist ideal of the perfect consumer. This transforms art into a superficial commodity and most of us into disinterested visitors of the global market of cultural services. "Opera or new dress", is the present day equivalent of "to be or not to be".

Coinciding with its 70th anniversary, celebrated with a multilingual poetry reading in front of an international audience, *Sodobnost* looks at new literary input emerging from migration. The Macedonian poet Lidija Dimkovska, living in Slovenia, interviews Carlos Aguilera, the young Cuban writer living in exile in Graz, Austria, concentrating on the advantages and drawbacks of exile.

The theme is echoed in an essay by Boris A. Novak, who eulogizes the bilingual poetic voice of Josip Osti, the Bosnian poet who has made Slovenia his home and is now writing poetry in Slovene. Another twist to the tale of exile is added by Branko Soemen, whose excerpt from an autobiographic novel recounts his time in prison in Tito's Yugoslavia from his relatively comfortable position as an exile in Hollywood.

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