



Eurozine Review

Varlik joins the normality debate; *Arena* sees Europe's self-image crack; *Magyar Lettre Internationale* reports on a Bosniak renaissance; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo) discovers hope in Bosnia; *Merkur* examines how cultural exports sold despotism to the West; *Arche* meets the Belarusian generation 2.0; *Host* defends Kundera against the enemies of success; and *Vikerkaar* bravos 400 years of opera.

Varlik 12/2007



Cem Deveci, writing in *Varlik*, argues that modernity has replaced a hierarchical value-system with multiple norms, which one may prioritize as one likes. Now, questions such as whether a technologically advanced state is necessarily a democratic one, whether industrial progress does more harm than good, and whether limitless consumption is a travesty of freedom, are casting doubt over modernity's promises.

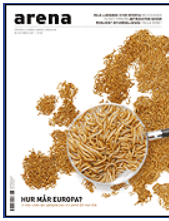
In Turkey, people are reaching for "super norms" that provide orientation in an era of uncertainty. This desire produces two attitudes: religiosity and nationalism. "A return to religion and pride in one's identity are, in general, considered normal." Yet to be modern, writes Deveci, "necessitates a struggle to uphold those human and secular norms we wish to be valid. Nihilistic attitudes serve those who perceive normality as a means of repression."

In Turkish translation: Speeches from the recent Eurozine conference 2007, "Changing places (What's normal, anyway?)", including [Mircea Vasilescu](#), "Normality or normalities? From one transition to the next"; and [Slavenka Drakulic](#), "Bathroom tales. How we mistook normality for paradise".

Literary perspectives: In a [series](#) initiated by Eurozine, renowned critics and authors review the literary landscapes of their respective countries, thereby bringing varying critical traditions and practices to the attention of international readers. Kicking off the series in its own pages, *Varlik* translates [Matt McGuire](#)'s excellent article on contemporary Northern Irish prose and poetry. While the Northern Irish literary tradition is closely bound up with the experience of sectarian violence, [writes](#) McGuire, contemporary poets and prose writers defy the assumption that "the troubles" are all there is to the country's literature.

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Arena 6/2007



Constructions of European identity are more often than not based on the contrast to the United States. Europe is different to the US: more humane, more just, more equal. Europeans watch Michel Moore's film *Sicko* and are horrified by the sight of American poverty. But at the same time, Europeans know very little about the dark sides of their own society. In a self-critical focus on the supposedly polar relationship between EU and the US, Swedish *Arena* asks if the European self-image stands the test of reality.

It turns out that cracks appear here and there in European self-indulgence. [Per Wirtén](#) touches an especially sore point: European poverty. "The EU machinery often declares that the fight against poverty has priority. But the responsibility for policy measures are still confined to national institutions and the ambition to see the whole is scattered in a geographic mosaic." Still, the figures are there, and they do not flatter Europe: every fourth Greek is in arrears with the most necessary bills (water, electricity, etc); 30 per cent of Estonians and almost as many Portuguese describe their housing as "slum-like"; 60 per cent of Romanians living under the poverty line have no access to an indoor toilet, 45 per cent of Lithuanians...

More on EU vs. USA: Ylva Bergman, editor of *Ottar*, a journal on sexual and reproductive rights, points to the obvious fact that abortion is a highly debated issue in the US. In the EU, however, it's a taboo question. Nobody seems to be prepared to take on the political fight against those countries that do not regard abortion as a human right.

Mats Wingborg takes a closer look at the anti-Semitic, homophobic, revisionist, and racist parties making their mark on European politics everywhere, including in the European parliament. These parties would be unthinkable in the US.

Europeans are outraged by the racism in the US but reproduce it at home, writes Lawen Mohtadi in an article about the "Rage against the Roma". In the EU you can still find segregated schools and dreams of ethnic cleansing. Roma are despised in every country in the Union.

Also to look out for: [Claus Leggewie's "Between national Church and religious supermarkets"](#), in which the European secularism comes across as half-hearted compared to the US.

The [full table of contents](#) of *Arena* 6/2007

Magyar Lettre 67 (2007–2008)



Viktoria Radics writes on the cultural renaissance of Bosniak culture in Sarajevo, exemplified by the publication of a new dictionary of the Bosnian language — "one with broad-ranging and liberal views that does not prescribe or archaize". The courtyards of Sarajevo's mosques, now restored, are once again centres of social life and young Bosniak women — to the dismay of an older generation of urbanites — are donning the *Mahram*, or headscarf.

Nevertheless, the traditionally liberal, western oriented Islam of the Bosniaks has a competitor in the form of the "pure Islam" preached in mosques funded from Saudi Arabia: "The contemporary tendency to pan-Islamism is to a great extent re-Islamizing secular Bosnian national identity [...] and in doing so drawing strong criticism from the liberal Bosnian intelligentsia."

Outside Sarajevo, the picture is rather different. In Stolac, where Croatian troops systematically destroyed traditional Muslim buildings (Radic calls this "urbanicide", the architectural correlate to the genocide of Stolac's Muslims), the Catholic community did all it could after the war to prevent the central mosque being rebuilt. Outward displays of Catholic piety are a favoured camouflage for wartime guilt, a local historian explains:

"The crosses were set up by war criminals and their supporters in order to justify their sinful deeds. They hide behind the cross. They thereby mislead Catholics, making it seem that crime and hatred is necessary in the defence of Christianity, in order to ensure the survival of Christians. They thus make themselves and every Christian that honours the cross party to 'hate as self-defence'."

Laziness: Introducing a Hungarian-German dossier on "The architecture of the everyday. Habit, laziness, inspiration", the editors write: "Inactivity often conceals a silent resistance to the presumptions of usual life, to the intrusions of an ever more demanding economy. The topic of inactivity reflects the crisis of the concept of work: not only is there not enough work to go round, work also no longer guarantees emancipation, progress, and education. The burden of work thus returns to the fore, and with it, the desire to shed that burden."

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Le Monde diplomatique (Oslo) 12/2007



"Bosnia's victims, 1991–1995: Total number of dead or missing: 97207". *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo) supplies this information in a neutral, grey box within Henrik Pryser Libell's article, "The graves of the blue butterflies". Following Amor Masovic, president of the Federal Commission of Missing Persons in Bosnia, in his untiring work to find and identify as many of the victims as possible, we are presented

with the bleak facts of the work and the political and emotional conditions attached to it. But there is hope. Through trips organized by the Norwegian Helsingfors Committee, youth from Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo visit sites where atrocities took place and meet rape victims and survivors of concentration camps, and genocide. Through coming to terms with the past, the aim is to move towards a unified future.

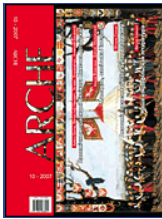
The failing immune system of the press: In a continuation of last issue's discussion of the gullibility of the Norwegian press (see the [Eurozine Review 27.11.2007](#)), [Kim Bredesen](#) asks just how vulnerable Norwegian media is to disinformation and manipulation. The overall consensus is that the press is overly receptive to psychological operations (PSYOP) and information war. The danger of this is that events are given undue importance in the media, which even serves to legitimize military operations — the military often being the unidentified source behind the information in the first place, writes Bredesen.

"No end in sight": Truls Lie, who visited the Danish documentary film festival CPH:DOX, asks; "can one via film really repossess reality and create justice?" He replies with a resounding "yes!", highlighting the film "No end in sight" by Charles Ferguson as a candidate. "Director Ferguson — with a doctorate in political science from American MIT — found no film about the "reconstruction" of Iraq and made his own. He went straight to the top level of US's own people in Iraq, and the interviews are revealing." The film is to be aired on NRK, Norwegian state television, in January 2008.

More film: Steffen Moestrup revisits *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) by Andrei Tarkovsky, and Arnstein Bjørkly discusses the revival of Romanian film with special focus on *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* by Cristian Mungiu, which recently won the best film prize at the European Film Awards in Berlin.

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Arche 10/2007



Writing in *Arche*, Iryna Vidanava analyses recent demonstrations in Belarus from the youth perspective. She attributes a central role to "generation 2.0" in the struggle for the hearts and minds of Belarusian society. Unlike their parents' generation, with its "kitchen discussions", younger Belarusians exchange ideas anonymously online. Statistics from NOVAK and Gallup complete Vidanava's image of a generation "possessed by hope".

Alaksandar Chubryk attempts to solve the "Belarusian riddle": Why, despite intense speculation about an economic collapse following Moscow's energy price hike, does Belarus's economy continue to grow? Among the reasons for the "miracle", Chubryk points out Belarus's customs union with Russia, a rise in the value of oil and other raw materials exported from Belarus, and the continuing gas subsidy from Russia.

Dzianis Mieljancou asks: "Will Belarus be admitted to GUAM?" (the alliance between Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova is seen as a counterweight to Russian influence in the region). The Russian–Georgian controversy and the sensational meeting between Lukashenko and Georgian Foreign Minister suggest as much. Mieljancou's conclusions are based on the threats and advantages of Belarus's membership in the regional association — all linked to energy policy and geopolitical developments following the parliamentary elections in Russia.

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Merkur 12/2007



Nearly twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, explanations still need to be sought for why a regime that protected its borders with maximum security fences, barbed wire, and mines was widely accepted by intellectuals in the West. In "Cracks in the wall", Detlev Schöttker writes that "The dissemination of the cultural output of the GDR in the West especially through films, the humanities, and literature,

contributed to the acceptability of the dictatorship and continued even when despotism was directed against representatives of culture themselves."

Early films produced by DEFA (the East German studios), were, due to their Nazi-period subject matter, already directed at both Germanys; the international success of *Jakob der Lügner* (1974) along with the presence of East German actors in Western productions reinforced the sense of a unified Germany *avant la lettre*. In the humanities, West German university libraries subscribed to East German journals, while Western journals in the 1970s and early 1980s debated topics imported from the East: theories of fascism, capitalism, working-class culture, and so on.

Literature featured most prominently in the cultural transfer. The more novelist and songwriter Wolf Biermann attacked the GDR regime, the better he served it as an alibi for political tolerance. Biermann's flight from the GDR in 1976 sharpened attention on the political status of literature in East Germany and East German émigré writers began provoking colleagues who had remained behind to support socialism. Meanwhile, Ulrich Plenzdorf's novel *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (1973), and later stage versions of it, set the tone for later East German rock music, whose expression of longing for individual freedom resonated broadly in the West.

Also to look out for: "Zoo-philosopher" Wolfgang Wieser argues that biological arguments will increasingly replace, or at least complement, psychoanalytical discussions on the nature of the human mind; and art historian [Wolfgang Kemp discusses](#) layman's publishing in the era of the blog.

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Host 9/2007



It's not every day that a politician makes it into the pages of a literary journal. The new issue of Brno-based *Host* prints Czech prime minister Mirek Topolánek's surprisingly eloquent speech delivered on the occasion of the award of the Czech State Prize for literature to Milan Kundera.

Dispirited by an ironic remark made by a prominent critic, "who, without omitting the author's juvenile verses praising Communism, completely left out *The Joke* [...] and stated that it would be better to completely abolish the State Prize for literature than give it to Kundera", Topolánek makes an equally ironic observation: "the fight against success obviously goes on".

American and anti-American literature: In an essay on Philip Roth's *The plot against America* — "When the inconceivable becomes real" — Michal Sykora praises Roth for insisting on the right to include his own ethical judgments in the text. In fact, Sykora's essay soon develops into an engaged defence of a literature that "guides readers in their value orientation and helps them to define their identity".

"Modernist experiments and postmodern puns offered such an orientation only in a very limited way; literature itself became the criterion. Very few modernist and postmodernist writers - such as Beckett or Nabokov - were able to say, in spite of the experimental character of their texts, something substantial about the world in which they lived. The end of literary postmodernism came (let's afford an overstatement) at the moment when writers again felt the need for

stories with a meaning."

Host also publishes [Jesper Gulddal's](#) ground breaking survey of the barely-charted territory of literary anti-Americanism: "[A heavy prelude to chaos](#)".

Also to look out for: Jiri Priban, professor of philosophy and sociology of law at Cardiff University, talks in interview about European identity: "Europe is a dispute over Europe..."

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Vikerkaar 10–11/2007



In 1607, Monteverdi's musical theatre piece *L'Orfeo* was performed for the first time at the Gonganza court in Mantua. Though Jacopy Peri had written his *Dafne* ten years earlier, the Mantua premiere was the birth of a genre. Celebrating 400 years of opera, Tallinn-based *Vikerkaar* devotes a double issue to what art historian Kenneth Clark has called "one of the strangest inventions of Western man".

The first Estonian opera, *Vikerlased* (Vikings), was staged in 1928. Poet and librettist Maarja Kangro looks at how the Estonian opera libretto has developed since then. The naive nationalist clichés of the 1920s and 1930s soon gave way to its communist counterparts in the 1940s and 1950s. In the following decades, there was room for more serious literary ambitions, but sometime in the 1980s the tragic grand opera exhausted itself. The contemporary revival of Estonian opera has instead taken on two contrasting minor forms, writes Kangro: the grotesque and the contemplative.

More on opera: Mardi Valgemäe surveys the history of opera in architecture and points to the opera houses in six European cities — Florence, Parma, Venice, Prague, Paris, and Bayreuth — as important signposts in the development of the genre. And Jaan Ross compares Bizet's *Carmen* with the story on which Bizet modelled his piece, a novella by Prosper Mérimée.

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