



## Eurozine Review

### The gothic way

*Arche* reacts to being censored yet again; *Merkur* sees Russia turn from historical amnesia to gothic morality; *Kulturos barai* comments on the Kundera case; *Blätter* solves Obama's dilemma; *Ny Tid* finds the Turkish PM more Bush than Obama; *Host* talks to the referee of American poetry; and *Critique & Humanism* surveys modern Bulgarian philosophy.

## Arche 10/2008



Despite the "memorandum of understanding" between the EU and Belarus signed at the beginning of this year, political freedoms in Belarus continue to be restricted. Yet again, *Arche* has been targeted by the censors. At the beginning of November, customs officers in Brest on the Polish–Belarusian border confiscated copies of *Arche* 7–8/2008. The issue was deemed to have encouraged political extremism, although *Arche's* editors were left to guess which the offending articles might have been (see [contents](#)). Since *Arche*, like all other print media in Belarus, is distributed by the state, the latter could itself be accused of promoting terrorism, *Arche's* editors have commented ironically.

In no other country in Europe do customs officers act as censors, writes [Andrej Dynko](#) in the new issue. In Belarus, all independent publications in Belarusian provoke paranoid suspicion from the authorities. This means that for millions of Belarusians, schoolbooks represent the sole encounter with the Belarusian language in its written form. This draconian cleansing of the domestic media space, writes Dynko, places Belarus in the same league as Burma and Uzbekistan.

**Zbigniew Herbert:** The issue is dedicated to the Polish poet on the tenth anniversary of his death. Alongside translations of Herbert's prose and poetry are critical articles by the Belarusian Maryna Kazlouskaja, the Russian Vladimir Britanishsky, and the Polish Stanislaw Baranczak.

**Also:** Maryja Martysievic claims that Belarusian literature has two souls while philosopher Vitaliy Ponomaryov counters that the concept is unsuitable for explaining Belarusian cultural and political reality; and Vasil Auramienka on the first mass anti–communist rally in Minsk 20 years ago, a caesura in the history of the Belarusian national movement.

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**Merkur 12/2008**

"Post-Soviet society is afflicted by partial amnesia that leaves its historical memory strangely selective. There is neither a political debate nor any passionate discussion among intellectuals on how Soviet crimes influenced and still influence Russian society today. There is no intellectual or political authority that could make post-Soviet society deal with the question of historical responsibility. The Soviet past is history without memory."

Nevertheless, continues Dina Khapaeva, a good portion of Russian popular films and literature deal with the Stalinist terror and are consumed with "sadistic voyeurism" by the Russian masses. Historical representation has been turned gothic: the "positive" heroes are not humans, but vampires and werewolves, acting out violence and corruption without taking into account universal moral standards. Murder and betrayal are common and by no means disdained: "The only true reality is the battle for personal wellbeing. [...] Personal loyalty towards superiors and respect for hierarchy constitute the most important, and the only uncontested, law of the gothic society."

Khapaeva detects a deep cultural pessimism in these works: "If we remove the vampires, werewolves and witches from these narratives and replace these non-humans with police officers, gangsters and their victims [...] the story could hardly be distinguished from a lacklustre account of everyday Russian life." Russian society, according to Khapaeva, is more and more adjusted to the rules of the "zona", the specific form of the Soviet camp, where criminals imposed their norms onto political prisoners in order to support the camp's administration. "The absence of resistance to the culture of the camp and the lack of willingness to reflect on the history of concentration camps makes present-day Russia especially susceptible to the gothic way."

**Also:** [David Wagner's account](#) of receiving a new liver in order to lead a new life.

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**Kulturos barai 11/2008**

Vilnius-based *Kulturos barai* publishes [Samuel Abrahám's](#) article on the [allegations against Milan Kundera](#). Whatever the outcome, writes Abrahám, the manner in which the accusations have been made represents a failure of journalistic decency.

In an accompanying editorial comment, *Kulturos barai* puts the case in a broader context:

"This is not only the result of the decline of journalistic ethics. Attacks of this kind hide other motives as well. The use of dubious evidence [...] is meant to undermine the moral authority of intellectuals in general. Meanwhile, those who

served in the KGB for years, those who informed on their neighbours, and those who willingly filed reports can feel at ease. Many of them still hold important institutional positions. Now they can say: all of us were somewhat dirty, all of us did some *service*."

**The philosophy of... traffic:** Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, public transport was a priority in many countries in eastern Europe. Cars were expensive and having one for personal use was a luxury. Higher incomes have allowed more people to buy cars and the Baltic capitals Riga and Vilnius are today among those eastern European cities plagued by increasingly time-consuming traffic jams.

[Almantas Samalavicius](#) comments on the current attempts to cope with the problems of "speed and urban transportation". Political debates tend to view the issue only from a technical perspective while what is really needed is a philosophical approach. Today, writes Samalavicius, "local social engineers" are unable to imagine a solution to the traffic and transportation problem that goes beyond the competing alternatives of tram and underground. What is really needed is a new social policy: pedestrian areas must be expanded, not reduced; cars should be banned from the Vilnius Old Town; and it must be made much easier to get around on a bicycle. "The vision of a future public transport system should include various types of buses and mini-buses instead of an extremely expensive underground project."

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### Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik 12/2008



*Blätter* acknowledges a genuine caesura in American history: "The first 16 US presidents could have owned the 44th president as a slave", writes Albert Scharenberg. But Obama was elected not for being black, but for being a race-neutral candidate. "Obama's achievement is to have forged a coalition capable of winning a majority, while being a member of a minority." But this same race-neutral approach presents him with major dilemmas: a majority of the rich as well as a majority of the poor voted for Obama. "Will under these conditions a redistribution of society's wealth, the breach with neo-liberal dominance, be possible?"

At the same time, a president elected for his race-neutral approach cannot address the existing racial structures in society: Obama's election has already been used to support the view that in a country with a black president, racism cannot account for the condition of the urban "lower classes", only individual failure. Still, Scharenberg sees a way out: "By implementing programmes to support the socially weak, Afro-Americans would automatically profit to a proportionally greater degree."

**Sixty years human rights:** On the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Franz-Josef Hutter and Carsten Kimmle concede that there has been considerable progress made in the "standardization and formation of institutions". But still:

"Although a growing number of states ratify the ever more concrete international Human Rights treaties (which means recognizing them as binding

under international law and assuring their implementation) not much changes in people's lives. [...] Practically every single article of the UDHR is violated around the world almost every day."

Not surprisingly the authors point to developments post-9/11: "Since then we not only have to talk about shortcomings in the safeguarding of human rights, but about major setbacks. [...] In the course of their anti-terror-strategies, a large number of states have changed a range of laws in ways *Hostile* to human rights."

**Also:** Gert Rosenkranz on the myths of the nuclear industry.

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### Ny Tid 48/2008



[Peter Lodenius](#), the longtime and now retired editor of Finland-Swedish *Ny Tid*, notes a worrying shift in Turkish politics. Today, prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has been regarded by many Europeans as a "voice of reason in a country suffering from an overdose of nationalism", seems to be more Bush than Obama. Recent statements by Erdogan and other ministers suggest that the ruling AK party is no

longer interested in reforms that would pave the way for a Turkish accession to the EU.

In the province Hakkari, on the border to Iran and Iraq, Erdogan addressed the Kurdish issue by saying that there is no alternative to the concept of "one nation, one state", adding that "those who don't like this can move somewhere else". And in Brussels, of all places, the Turkish minister of defence thanked Atatürk for getting rid of the Greeks and the Armenians and thereby making room for the Turkish nation.

Referring to the editor-in-chief of the English language edition of *Today's Zaman*, generally regarded as moderately pro-Islamist, Lodenius speculates about the motives behind this shift: the AKP "has made a deal with the establishment — a compromise in return for not being shut down — and is now complying with the requirements of this deal." This could turn out to be political suicide — and would prevent Turkey from solving "the Kurdish problem" and becoming "a real democracy".

**Multilingualism and Europe:** Heidi Johansson reports in depth on the [Eurozine conference](#) on multilingualism and networking recently held in Paris. She is critical towards the dominance of the "big" languages, even in this allegedly open setting. She notes that the point of the provocation by [Carl Henrik Fredriksson](#), who made some of his interventions in Swedish, was appreciated by all participants representing small language communities — but that it was not well-received by others, especially the French.

Calling for a less hegemonic perspective, Johansson quotes a conference statement by Daho Djerbal, editor of the Algerian journal *NAQD*: "We, coming from North Africa, are erased from the map of Europe. [...] We have been forced to prove that we can juggle with the same references, speak the same Spinoza and Hegel language [as the Europeans]. In fact, we have to

simultaneously master two ways of looking at the world, two narratives."

More [about Ny Tid](#)

### Host 9/2008



David Lehman is the editor of a new edition of *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*, a one-volume anthology of poems from A to Z. He initiated *The Best American Poetry* series in 1988 and received a Guggenheim Fellowship a year later.

Milan Dezinysky happened upon a midnight-blogger who couldn't bear Lehman. Anyone who has the courage to assess what is best or worst in the world of literature is bound to provoke dispute, and clearly this blogger had not taken well to Lehman's position in the world of poetry. This awakened Dezinysky's curiosity, and over the course of a year he conducted an interview by e-mail with Lehman. The result is published in *Host* under the title "There's always someone who says that poetry is dead".

**The point of poetry:** In a recent series of articles in *Host*, Petr Bohác and Stefan Svec provided strongly worded criticism of the current state of poetry, and literature in general. The articles proved poignant enough to be picked up by the journal *Tvar*, which is edited by Lubor Kasal. Kasal is also a poet, and his bi-monthly journal encourages debate about contemporary literature and its current quality and function. *Host* has interviewed him about his views and his poetry.

Also: Milan Kundera's reflections on European novelists and modernism in "Die Weltliteratur"; and an interview with Karel Piorecky, the editor of the forthcoming anthology *Best Czech Poems*.

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### Critique & Humanism 28 (2009)



*Critique & Humanism* devotes an issue to the modern history of Bulgarian philosophy. In an introductory article, Ventseslav Kulov notes that Bulgarian philosophers began enquiring into the nature of philosophy during the nineteenth century, at a time when different notions of philosophy co-existed. Ivan Georgov and Krustyo Krustev were notable figures in this line of thought. Marxist-Leninist philosophy, however, rendered meaningless the question of the essence of philosophy. Since the collapse of communism, philosophers in Bulgaria have renewed the Bulgarian philosophical tradition, writes Kulov. The rest of the issue presents the various strands of philosophical enquiry in Bulgaria today.

Iassen Zahariev surveys debates in the philosophy of science from biology and racism to genetics and physics; Nina Dimitrova paints a picture of anthropological philosophy during "the long twentieth century"; Nedialka Videva traces the vicissitudes of Bulgarian ethical philosophy and Atanas

Stamatov looks at the philosophy of history; Camelia Zabilova portrays the "many-tongued" character of contemporary Bulgarian aesthetics; and Maria Stoicheva enquires into the reception of analytical philosophy in the country.

**East translates East:** Translations from Lithuanian journal *Kulturos barai*, part of the project "[Diagnosing the present](#)". [Almantas Samalavicius](#) observes that "High post-communism" in Lithuania is defined by efforts to control collective memory, political discourse dominated by abstract concepts, and the cult of entertainment. [Tomas Kavaliauskas](#) argues that consumerism grounded in indebtedness means financial dependence as opposed to democratic freedom. [Rasa Balockaite](#), citing Homi Bhabha, [proposes](#) that cultural and political life in Lithuania is marked by "ironic compromise". And [Skaidra Trilupaityte](#) writes that the Vilnius Guggenheim is indicative of the conviction that "de-provincialization" can only be achieved by taking part in global projects.

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