



Eurozine Review

Pirates, puritans and tragic humanists

New Humanist talks to Terry Eagleton about reason, faith and revolution; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Berlin) lambasts bastard Keynesianism; *Esprit* sails the pirate infested waters of the Internet; *Arche* articulates a Belarusian multiculturalism; *NZ* searches in vain for the seat of Russian identity; *Blätter* says the fight over MON 810 is about more than a few acres of corn; *dérive* shows the dual function of one-way streets; *Ord&Bild* maps the crisis of the "Volvo nation"; and *Host* finds French eroticism crueller than Czech.

New Humanist 4/2009



There has always been a Catholic undercurrent in the thought of Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton, but now it has erupted in an attack on "the new atheists". In the *London Review of Books*, Eagleton branded Richard Dawkins as "theologically illiterate": "What one wonders are Dawkin's views on the epistemological differences between Aquinas and Duns Scotus? Has he read Eriugena on subjectivity, Rahner on grace or Moltmann on hope? Has he even heard of them?"

Talking to Laurie Taylor about his new book *Reason, Faith and Revolution*, Eagleton argues that the new atheists "don't understand that Christianity is not about how many months you get in purgatory for adultery. It's about a love and a thirst for justice that will bring you to your death. There's nothing lovely about it." Indeed, Eagleton turns his Christian socialism against what he sees as Dawkins' liberal Hegelianism:

Dawkins deeply believes in the flourishing of the free human spirit, which makes him a liberal humanist rather than a tragic humanist. He believes that if only those terrible guys out there would stop stifling and shackling us, then our creative capacities would flourish. I don't believe that. As a Marxist I reject that simple liberationism. I'm not against humanism. I'm for a humanism which recognizes the price of liberation. And that's what I call tragic humanism.

Moral clarity: The language of morality has been hijacked by the religious Right, argues Susan Neiman. Yet however shabbily its partisans may behave, they offer a public conception of goodness the Left forgot how to defend. "The first step in reclaiming moral language for progressive use is to show that while moral needs may be furthered by religion, it is not what keeps them alive. Rather, morality is grounded in the structure of reason itself. Moral inquiry and political activism start where reasons are missing."

Don't miss: For subscribers, the first instalment of God Trumps — *New Humanist's* metaphysical card game for all the family!

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Le Monde diplomatique (Berlin) 7/2009



The first big economic crisis of the twenty-first century marks the end of a failed economic experiment, [writes Karl Georg Zinn](#). Already in the 1970s, the growth paradigm was no longer tenable; yet since then, policy has underwritten growth by means of unprecedented global credit expansion. "It cannot have escaped anyone's notice that a significant part of the economic growth of the last decade — anyway relatively low — was only made possible by the orgy of debt."

What Keynes defined as "endogenous causes" are a central factor to economic slowdown, writes Zinn. However the return of state monopoly capitalism under the brand name of "Keynesianism" is a con. "So-called 'stimulus packages' can't do much about permanent economic weakness and accompanying mass unemployment. For such situations, Keynes recommended very different measures — albeit ones that don't turn up in the contemporary Keynesian blah-blah."

More taboo still than the theory of stagnation is the ecological critique of growth. Compared to the "foreseeable problems for our planet and its inhabitants, the current economic crisis appears almost harmless. By no means harmless, however, are desperate attempts to solve the problem by more economic growth. Not only will that not succeed [...] it will also waste time. Instead of using the crisis to introduce a fundamental reform of the system, the opposite is being attempted — namely to restore the status quo."

The Spanish property trap: Raúl Guillen describes how home owners in Spain are struggling to pay back mortgages at rates set during the boom years between 2004 and 2007. The story of a young couple locked into a debt trap by the combination of unscrupulous lending, weak legal protection for mortgage borrowers, a culture of property-owning, the financial crisis, and sheer inexperience is all too common.

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Esprit 7/2009



The image of the pirate is everywhere, from pirate radio to Internet file-sharing, while the original lives on both in film and in reality off the coast of Somalia. In an issue of *Esprit* devoted to piracy, Antoine Garapon explains why pirates appear so relevant to the modern world. The sea represents a realm beyond state control; pirates, at home in this environment, pose not just a challenge to governments, but to the very idea of sovereignty. As globalization erodes the power of the nation-state, this unpoliced world is moving from the margins of civilization to its centre. Offshore finance, which dodges government tax demands and recognizes no permanent allegiance, is closer to piracy than most would admit. The pirate,

that greedy, opportunist nomad, is a perfect model for the global capitalist.

The ethics of pillage: Puritans and pirates may seem an unlikely combination, but [Olivier Abel](#) finds that they have much in common. The Atlantic of the seventeenth century was destination of choice for dissenting Protestants and

also the setting for the "golden age" of piracy. Beyond occupying the same place in history and geography, they shared the fantasy of leaving one society to found another. The principle of the "right to leave", which saw religious dissenters abandoning Europe to establish their own communities, is embodied also in the pirate ship, crewed by deserters from merchant and military navies, where each sailor can demand his share of the booty and depart. What divides the two groups is the gulf between a Protestant work ethic and what could be called the "ethics of pillage".

Intellectual piracy: Modern proponents of pillage have now found their political voice in the "Pirate Party", which last month won its first seat in the European parliament. As Nicolas Auray explains, this is the latest mutation of a culture that has adopted the moniker "pirate". Clustered around websites such as The Pirate Bay, they freely share music, films and other data, without regard for copyright. Their electoral victory represents the successful politicization of cyberspace by digital natives, achieving something that established political forces have failed to do. Their practical success in evading copyright laws demonstrates that the Internet remains what the ocean once was: a space just beyond the reach of state and corporate control.

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Arche 5/2009



The road signs say it all: in Lithuania, Belarusian cities are called by their Lithuanian versions ("Minskas" not "Minsk), but in Belarus road signs defer to the Lithuanian ("Vilnius" not "Vilnia"). Belarusian lack of national pride, [writes Rashed Chowdhury](#), is compensated for by attempts to "turn Belarus into a fortress at a time when 27 of our neighbouring countries, including five Slavic ones and four Orthodox

Christian ones, see their future not in self-isolation, but in the construction of "a common European home --- to borrow a phrase from Mikhail Gorbachev."

"On half the billboards in Minsk, one can see the beaming faces of representatives of various branches of the armed forces, happily prepared to sacrifice themselves in defending the country. The only question is: from whom? In reality, Belarus has no enemies today. But that does not prevent a girl dressed in national costume from saying to her border-guard boyfriend on one of these billboards, 'I will go with you to the border.'"

Another way of overcoming the sense of national shallowness is to unite nationality and religion. "Insane", says Chowdhury: Belarus can be a Christian country, but it must never be a country for Christians. "Today we have a Belarusian state of our own. We therefore have to create the conditions in which minorities will feel proud of their belonging to Belarus. For that, what we need most of all is for all citizens of Belarus to have a common word that they can call themselves by."

Also: Belarusian entry into the Eastern Partnership programme signals the failure of Lukashenka's ambition to forge alliances only with other CIS countries, writes Arche blogger Andrzej Poczobut. And [Jury Chavusau](#) writes: "If the liberalization of Belarusian economy advances, the domestic political milieu will be faced not with perestroika but détente."

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Neprikosnovennij zapas 65 (2009)



"Representations of Russia as saviour of the human race are no more than the inverse of our readiness to disparage ourselves", writes Igor Smirnov in a wry look at Russian patriotism. "The question why Russians regard themselves as congenitally deficient cannot be divorced from the question of why our public lavatories are uniformly deprived of toilet seats. [...] In order to establish our national identity we consistently sanction the absence of the most indispensable things."

NZ editor Ilya Kalinin, meanwhile, considers the Russian cultural tradition's paradoxical claims both to universality and uniqueness, to messianism and isolationism. "In Russia the 'open' and the 'closed' are not alternating historical periods but simultaneously existing tendencies. [...] To be acceptable, that which belongs to another must first become 'ours'."

Nationalism and aesthetics: Curator Andrey Klyukanov observes that in the late 1980s and 1990s Russian artists lost all their illusions. "They were given to understand that Russia is not a unique country but a periphery of Europe [...] The result was that Russian artists simply filled existing niches, responding to the expectations of the West." And Aleksey Bobrikov assesses the work of Aleksey Belyaev–Gintovt, whose association with the far–right Eurasian movement has troubled some critics. Gintovt should not be viewed as an extreme nationalist because his work is steeped in irony and open self–mockery, Bobrikov contends.

Alternative histories: In a section on emotional life in the USSR, Rozalia Cherepanova writes on the intimate histories of a group of educated, professional Soviet women who recall their search for fulfilment in an ethos that propagated motherhood as a "mission" yet expected women to contribute fully to the economic and cultural development of the country. And Sergei Yarov analyses social discourse and storytelling during the siege of Leningrad, when talking about food became an "art form" that no amount of official intervention could displace.

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Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik 7/2009



In April 2009, Germany banned the cultivation of the genetically modified corn MON 810, the sixth EU country to do so. MON 810, which contains a naturally occurring poison that kills the destructive larvae of the European Corn Borer, was proven to attack other non–harmful insects as well — contrary to the assurances of its producer Monsanto. Since then, [writes Heike Moldenhauer](#), industry lobby groups and their spokespeople in the scientific community have been lamenting irreparable damage to Germany's image as "country of innovation". Moreover, they claim "diffuse fear" jeopardizes GM's potential for curing a series of ills, from worldwide hunger to climate change and the energy crisis.

Since only 0.1 per cent of EU farmland is used for GM crops, writes Moldenhauer, the issue for the agro-chemical industry is primarily their business model as such — and whether or not they can impose it on one of the world's most important agricultural markets. In eastern Germany — where high levels of agricultural industrialization means larger fields and less chance of polluting a neighbouring farm's crop, and where farmland is often rented by non-local operators with no sense of responsibility for the land — that model had until now gone unopposed.

"The major companies propagate an agricultural model whose ideal is industrial production, with a heavy use of artificial fertilizer and sprays, at the same time reducing costs by reducing manpower, fuel, and machinery. That is the reason they produce genetically modified plants." The six multinationals that market GM crops — a global oligopoly — have one interest in common, writes Moldenhauer: securing their core business, the sale of herbicides, to which their herbicide resistant seeds are the necessary pendant.

Europe and the Left: Happy to project upon Europe the image of a continent that has "learned the lessons of history", the Left has remained ambivalent about Europe as a political entity, writes [Albrecht von Lucke](#). The European elections have made clear, however, that Europe's real sceptics vote for the far-Right: "One more reason to abandon the territory of mere opposition as fast as possible — both at the international and national levels."

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dérive 36 (2009)



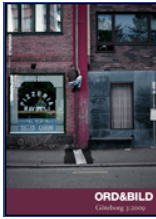
The Austrian magazine for urban research *dérive* shows that there are always two sides to the gentrification coin. While raising overall living standards, well-meant redevelopment projects in the *Stuwerviertel* in Vienna steamroller the elderly, the poor and the unemployed, writes Roman Seidl. "Through redevelopment, the stock of old buildings loses its capacity to sustain the low-income population." Viennese city planning has abandoned its glorious past of social housing for disadvantaged citizens and now builds accommodation that requires financial input from future tenants.

Also: Eva van Rahden, director of a Viennese organization for advising and supporting prostitutes, talks to editor Christoph Laimer about attempts to regulate (i.e. displace) prostitution in the *Stuwerviertel* via an intricate one-way system.

Bottom up: The inhabitants of large housing estates in Recife, Brazil, have carried out some improvements of their own, finds Katharina Kirsch-Soriano da Silva. If the tenants want a window, they break through the wall; if they want a patio or veranda, they build one; if they want new paths and shortcuts between the buildings, they make them. Da Silva advises architects and city planners "to study processes of use and occupancy and the accompanying physical activities as an essential source of information and inspiration."

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Ord&Bild 3/2009



In an issue dedicated to *Ord&Bild's* hometown Gothenburg, journalist Mattias Hagberg writes a revealing reportage on the city's dominant industry: Volvo.

Sweden is a country heavily dependent on car manufacturing, the centre of which is Gothenburg. Just like in Detroit in the US, Ruhr in Germany, or Aichi in Japan, most things in Gothenburg revolve around the car, both industrially and intellectually. "The car is no longer just a means, it is the end in itself", writes Hagberg, who sees more than just an asymmetry between supply and demand in the current automobile crisis. It is a crisis for the project of modernity as a whole, which has become almost entirely synonymous with motorism. "In Gothenburg this is painfully visible."

If car manufacturing were to collapse, almost a quarter of the working population in Gothenburg would be out of a job. "According to some experts, the financial crisis is a badly needed acid test that will lead to the rationalization and modernization of the automobile industry. Some manufacturers will most likely perish, some of the nodes in the world-wide industrial network will disappear. But which? Detroit, Aichi, Ruhr, Gothenburg?"

"The catastrophe, the total crash that could be the result of the current crisis, is of such a magnitude that it inevitably presents a threat to the entire society of western Sweden", concludes Hagberg. But instead of discussing how to save the automobile industry — the "motorism system" is doomed anyway — politicians, trade unions and corporate managers must start to rethink: "In a few years, Gothenburg might not be a car town anymore. What do we want it to be instead?"

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Host 6/2009



An interview with poet Bohumila Grögerová, this year's winner of the Czech literary award Magnesia Litera, is the centerpiece of an issue of *Host* dedicated to "fading beauty". Since the end of the 1950s, she and Josef Hirsal have been pioneers of a poetry experimenting with flukes, phonetics and word play. "We hated socialist realism with its set phrases and ideology. For us the ideal means of

communication was clear, witty, and simple verse that was also visually and acoustically appealing. It was a tool of international communication that couldn't be abused."

Érotisme: Veronika Kosnárová writes on French erotic literature and its influence on Czech surrealists Jindrich Styrsky and Vitezslav Nezval. French erotic prose, notes Kosnárová, tends to have strong sadomasochistic elements: both Pauline Réage (*Histoire d'O*) and Bernard Noël (*Le Château de Cène*)

understand love as inextricable from cruelty and violence. The Czech surrealists, on the other hand, focus more on the erotic imagination and its roots in childhood and adolescence. Nezval's work, while containing a "French spirit", emerges from de Sade's shadow: readers seeking scenes of sexual cruelty are best served by the French!

Also: Leonard Cohen has described his work as a part of an "unremitting battle against boredom and insignificance". In an article on the master of dreariness, Jakub Guziur finds in Cohen's search for "the authentic wells of spirituality" a unique picture of the situation of modern man. This, tempered by his irony, creates an unusual depth of sincerity that accounts for Cohen's distinct imprint on pop music.

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