



# [marginalia]

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Dear reader,

With the recent departure of many of the members of the Marginalia editorial team from SSEES, it seemed at the end of the last academic year that there might not be any subsequent issues of this journal. The copy you are now holding in your hands, however, is proof that these fears were ungrounded: Marginalia has garnered an unprecedented amount of interest this term from students at SSEES as well as outside of it. The result is our biggest and most diverse issue yet, which, like previous editions of the journal, publishes comments from readers alongside the contributions themselves, thus hoping to stimulate dialogue and discussion.

We are immensely pleased that Marginalia can continue as an outlet for all sorts of applications of the written word relating to the SSEES region this academic year, and are sure that you will find something in the wide range of contributions that will catch your interest. There is much to choose from: two creative writing pieces, two essays, two translations, as well as three reviews – of a book, an exhibition and a film. In addition, we bring you as the feature piece an extract from an original research project – three interviews with Russian-speaking Estonian politicians.

As always, we encourage you, as readers, to actively take part in the process of marginalia – we welcome feedback on our blog (<http://journalmarginalia.wordpress.com>) and hope that perhaps this issue will entice you to engage in commenting on the next issue, which we hope to publish at the end of the next term!

The Marginalia Editorial Team

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## Authentic Taste

I was living at 29 Ulitsa Dekabristov in Saint Petersburg, the grand old dame of the Russian Empire. My apartment lay opposite the Mariinsky Theatre of Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky; the ethereally brilliant poet Osip Mandelstam grew up at number 17, and his spiritual mentor, Aleksandr Blok, died in the house at the end of the street; some of the most infamous Futurist performances - Russia's answer to the Cocteau/Satie Parades - were staged here, in what is now a petrol station; even the avenue's name, 'Decembrists' Street', evokes the fated uprising by the nobility in 1825. Each day I trod the cobbles dedicated to Russia's first revolutionaries. I was on the verge of suffocation from accumulative cultural history. Yet on that street I discovered a slice of another, altogether less lauded culture, and it has proved more telling: I have no desire to return to Russia's literary ghosts, but I am drawn southwards, to the borderland of that Empire upon which Petersburg was the jewelled crown- the Caucasus.

\*

One morning, when Petersburg's bloated winter was collapsing into spring, I made a discovery in my newsagent: bottles of pure pomegranate juice at fifty pence a litre. Pure pomegranate juice is the most delicious drink I have ever tasted, the perfect refreshment: brusque tartness so deliciously balanced by lingering sweetness that you have to keep gulping it down to rekindle the sensation. I drank my first bottle in one sitting and went straight out to buy five more. Within a week I was consuming two litres every day. The label on the bottle featured a map of its country of origin, Azerbaijan. Something became unpleasantly clear: I was in the wrong place.

\*

I freely admit that I chose to study Russian because of an adolescent fascination with Dostoevsky (a fascination, thankfully, that has not subsided). Literature is as sensible a reason as any to throw oneself into that angular Cyrillic typography concealing a grammatical jungle of unruly inflection; not to mention the wracked, slippery past of the country and the ugliness of much of its contemporary culture. The coolly monumental verses of Pushkin, the phantasmagoria of Gogol,

and the witty fatalism of Brodsky are invaluable study guides in this sprawl, vindicating by their canonical writ what was essentially my naivety. If I say that I wish to venture into the Caucasus armed only with a love of fruit juice – that is a decision that seems childish. I protest: it is the more measured. Literature, said Nabokov, is ‘that fancy, free thing,’ and if it were purely mimetic it would cease to exist. Gogol’s Petersburg is populated by mad clerks, ghosts, and noses dressed as people: when I walked off the plane, was this honestly what I expected to discover? And yet my craving to inhabit Petersburg would have been sorely diminished were it not for the products of Gogol’s free and fancy imagination. The pleasure of pomegranates, on the other hand, is immeasurably real. It is so direct, essential, that it does not depend for its force on the creaking weight of some artistic canon; it provokes the dualist in me by circumventing the tiresome cerebrum to impact sweetly upon the tongue; and it is so tangibly connected to the geography of a place, with its culinary traditions and climatic conditions (try growing pomegranates in Petersburg). This is the surer topographical incentive, and a blow to all the books I have slaved over. Indeed, it took a writer of the genius of Proust even to intuit this fact, and he still makes the concession of tying his madeleine-induced revelry to revelation.

My appetite for the Caucasus dragged me around Petersburg. First, to a beautiful little Georgian restaurant. After months of Russian ‘cuisine’ (only the most brutal vegetables survive the winter there), it was a welcome shock. Here were aubergines and walnuts, hot cheesy bread, herbs and lamb’s brains, red wine and, of course, pomegranates. The Georgians say that when God had distributed the national cuisines of the world, he was left with a plate of delicious yet seemingly incompatible nibbles; distracted by the conundrum, he tripped over the Caucasus mountains and dropped it into Georgia. A conception formed.

I had always thought of Russia as a powerful aporia between Europe and Asia, which would clarify my thoughts on both; yet it is too large and the Soviet Union has made it too homogeneous, so that any clarification it might offer is diffuse. The Caucasus, though, seemed intense, animated. Wedged between the Black and Caspian Seas, a sliver of territory where Russia leans down on Asia, the vitality of the land seemed to have expressed itself in the sheer mountains and the heterogeneity of its people: over 50 ethnic groups, 3 language families found nowhere else, Orthodox Christians alongside both Sunni and Shia. (Fittingly enough, this cheap ethno-

Romanticism has a long history in Russian literature, the language of the colonialists. Lermontov and Pushkin both evoked the Caucasus as a wild yet noble borderland: compared to the endless monotony of Russian grain fields, it must have proved just too convenient a device.) Speaking of mountains and God, the Caucasus is couched between two Mounts of yore, Ararat and Elbrus. The asymmetry is delicious: one God grants salvation to a man willing to bear devastation; his more perceptive predecessors punish their own for helping man to strike out on his own.

Then, concrete Caucasian artefacts formed a concrete itinerary: Georgia's proliferation of austere cathedrals; the repository of antique manuscripts in Yerevan's Matenadaran library; the Palace of the Shirvanshahs', crouched in central Baku. That initial sip of pomegranate juice had led me more surely to these things than Dostoevsky had ever helped me to settle in Petersburg. My knowledge at present extends as far as a Rough Guide, but I am able to make a trip on surer foundations. No walking noses live in Petersburg, but pomegranates grow in Baku. I've checked.

Accusations will resurface that it is flippant, even immature, to laud the place based only on a predilection for fruit. Yet if this pomegranate crush really is a childish pursuit, then it is only in the sense that it is an honest one.

Samuel Goff

**Comment [BS1]:** A very nice, thoughtful piece. I wonder how these different attractions/introductions to a place - one via the cerebrum and one through the taste buds - might end up influencing what you do with those places. You presumably won't be forsaking the tiresome shackles of the mind for the sensual pleasures of the body in the Caucasus; how might the mind treat this place differently, then?

**Comment [ICM2]:** Goff's text enticed me to venture in search of the pomegranate in the Caucasus. Have you, Samuel, thought to write for the sake of travel writing? Or are you doing that already?! If I were to stumble on this text in a travel writing column I would go in search of Georgia's pomegranates not just because of your skill in describing so elegantly the places you have seen, but also because of your talent for describing how the senses can become the only guide to reveal to the mind what the mind cannot do on its own.

Your stumbling over a pomegranate in a juice bottle from the Caucasus sold miles away from the place of its birth may be a synchronicity, a coincidence with meaning, which revealed itself in the realness of your feelings you had whilst on your Caucasus trip. The authenticity in YOUR writing about the Caucasus is that in your words I found your Caucasus, the original place as you saw it and 'drank it' in the bottle of your soul, to calm the thirst for what I conceive to be a far-away place.

The only aspect I would have liked to read about is the people of the Caucasus. Where are the people? How are the people I am going to meet on my travels to the Caucasus?

## Old Barnacled Umbilicus

### *A Subjective, Self-Indulgent Exploration of National Identity*

This summer, there are forest fires. The smoke outside looks like thick fog. We try not to breathe. The temperature has stayed in the nineties for the past two weeks, while Kate was here, and we spent our days talking about family, society, culture, rationality and irrationality, all those things – still, I know that

it's impossible for me to think rationally about my country or my mother. Their images are interchangeable, of course, **intertwined**. Every new impression, a landscape seen out of a bus window, an argument at home, any political change – all of it contributes to the massive shadowy force that I wish I could get rid of. Oh, it's her! Hateful, overwhelming, destructive, an enemy to everything that is good and new – and she gave birth to me. Which obviously means that she will pull me back into the primeval darkness. You know: the womb, certain death. Yoshkar-Ola. I could try to run, and I have been (America! Surely she cannot exist in a place this rational!), but when I am away from her, I hear her speaking with my voice, looking through my eyes. She is me. It's **hopeless!**

**Comment [VP3]:** The word "Motherland" comes to mind here – you capture well why it's called that.

**Comment [BS4]:** Wonderful paragraph.

All this after having the biweekly fight with my mom over being vegetarian. In the morning, I run away to grandmother's village. She is quiet, kind and gentle, purely good. We go to Polanur to see my cousins, walking side by side, in silence. And we talk, random silly stuff and deep soulful stuff. There's tea and pancakes. We sit on the bench outside her house, watching her chickens, her dogs and her cat (certainly a bandit as far as cats go). We both wear headscarves to Peledysh Pairem, the Flower Festival, and we hold hands.

So despite myself, I start forgiving people; not just my mom, even; other people too, and myself. Then, when the Peledysh Pairem concert begins, something in me breaks down or breaks through, and I cry. The woman on stage starts singing in Mari, and people start dancing right then and there, and I can't help crying anytime I see Mari dancing, because it's just incredible, the way they abandon themselves to joy... The economy is falling apart, the political situation is repressive, and their nation might be dying – but here they are, dancing and singing! It begins to rain, and I stand there

sobbing. This is my mother, and this is my country, and no matter how horrible and messed up they seem, I must love them, just like that. I must love them! There is no other way: no psychological technique, no change of address will set me free. Just love, and it's not easy, it's a choice made every day. It's purifying, I suppose, maybe Christ would be proud of me.

In England, further away from it all, loving seems an easier task. Imagine it now, the golden vision of the Russian countryside: digging potatoes, sorting onions, picking apples. I want to be walking through fields and laying down on riverbanks, as close to the earth as possible.

**Irina Sadovina**

**Comment [BS5]:** So it seems like geographical estrangement is also part of the recipe. I also feel sometimes that distance from home allows for a certain deliberateness in negotiating an understanding, or a balance. It is of course difficult to maintain the intellectual/emotional dissonance of the extremes of idealizing homesickness and the kind of repulsion bred by deep familiarity with the problems of home; but perhaps distance does make this easier, even while it can act as the key engine for these feelings in the first place.

**Comment [LC6]:** Your description of your relationship with your motherland/mother/culture/self is very beautiful and vivid: I think it will resonate among many expats.



## Conversations

### *The Puzzle of The Russian-Speakers in Estonia in Three Chapters*

#### CHAPTER I. Igor Grjazin. A Russian-speaker?

*In which the author enters the Riigikogu for the first time to meet a Russian-speaking MP from the conservative Reform Party, is informed that hairdressers are under-represented in the Estonian parliament, and learns about the existence of a one-party undemocratic region within democratic Estonia.*

#### **Do you think that there is a problem of lack of representation of the Russian-speaking minority in Estonian politics, especially at the state level?**

[Long pause] Well, maybe so. But I don't think it is much of a problem, because the working language of the Estonian parliament is Estonian and it doesn't make much difference what your native language is. And anyway, you could always say that here there aren't enough hair-dressers, cobblers, Russian-speakers, English-speakers and so on. Is that a problem?

[...]

#### **Some political scientists say that the lack of representation of the Russian-speakers at the state level is compensated by their representation at the local level. Do you agree?**

To a certain extent yes, of course the Russian-speaking population is strongly represented in some regions of the country. But ... take for example Narva or Kohtla-Järve, where in fact there is a one-party system, where in fact democracy doesn't exist at all: there, only one party [the Centre Party] is represented and only in Russian. [...] It is impossible for other parties to enter the competition. It's an exclusive circle, it's a sort of clan kept together by family, criminal and communal links, and thus it's practically impossible for an outsider to get into it.

[...]

#### **According to recent surveys, Russian-speakers in Estonia tend not to be interested in politics. Why do you think this is the case?**

[...] The Russian electorate, as a matter of fact, is rather inactive and, in general, rather lazy. If you look for instance at the situation in Russia: Russian voters in Russia, in Moscow, are also lazy, they don't get engaged in practically anything. And here, in principle, it's the same.

#### **So...you think that the reason is...ethnic?**

Well, yes, it could be! Or simply it is a Russian tradition, to think 'the government doesn't depend on me'. I mean, it was already so under the tsars, for 450 years. Quite simply, there is not the habit of participation. You can go on the streets, shout at meetings, but simply there is not the habit of working sy-ste-ma-ti-cal-ly for politics.

**Comment [IS7]:** There are more Russians than hairdressers, and hairdressing is beside the point anyway. Ah, Mr. Grjazin, leading the conversation away from the national question! Tricky.

**Comment [IS8]:** Um, yes? At least allow the citizens to have a say, since the stateless Russian speakers don't have any claim to political visibility at all, and will have to resign themselves to poverty and HIV! I am obviously totally unbiased and completely reasonable, as an academic should be.

**Comment [BS9]:** Systematic social disenfranchisement within Estonia couldn't be part of the problem, I'm sure.

**Comment [IS10]:** Maybe Moscow is politically apathetic, but in comparison with the provinces it's Greenwich village. I'll blame my own laziness on socialization or genetics. We Russians dig potatoes and don't care about the doings of the tsar.

**But here in Estonia, a substantial part of the Russian-speakers are citizens of Estonia. Doesn't it make any difference?**

No, this doesn't change much. They simply have the privileges and obligations of citizens, but that doesn't make them more active.

[...]

**How would you assess the integration process?**

Integration? Badly! Because integration is the wrong idea to begin with!

?

Yes, because the whole idea of integration meant in fact Estonisation of the Russians, and neither the Russians nor the Estonians wanted it. Instead of integration, there should have been a completely different programme: segregation. That is, two separate communities (*obshchiny*), which live next to each other, respect each other, and don't try to suppress each other.

[Later in the conversation] Now that I think about it, I used that unfortunate expression 'two *obshchiny*', it's completely untrue: it would be better to refer to 'one *obshchina*', because the Estonians haven't got an *obshchina*, they have got a state. [...] We haven't got used to it yet, that we are not an *obshchina*, that we are a state. They are an *obshchina*.

**Comment [IS11]:** Fatal word choice.

**Comment [BS12]:** Curious that Grjazin seems to self-identify with the Estonian-speaking majority rather than the Russian-speaking minority here... He might be surprised when, if his 'segregation' plan is enacted, he's lumped in with *those* Russian-speakers and gets to live in a Narva bloc with his ethnic brethren.

CHAPTER II. Eldar Efendiev. The Centrist.

*In which the author spends two hours in the parliament café, listens to an interesting interpretation of the role of the Centre Party in Estonia's party politics, and is asked to switch off the recorder when things start to get intriguing.*

[...]

All would be all right had there not existed the category of 'non-citizenship' or had the non-citizens been much fewer. [...] This raises the question not only of the level of representation of the Russian-speakers in the policy-making process, but also of the legitimacy of a government which one third of the population does not have the right to vote for. [...] From the point of view of the Constitution, of the law, everything is legitimate, but from the point of view of proportionality a question arises. [...] The problem is that if there are these people without citizenship, can they be considered citizens of the EU or not?

**And why do you think the question of 'non-citizens' is still pending?**

Estonia is a small country [...] and also the quantity of resources is small, and so literally every single resource that one manages to

obtain has a decisive impact. [...] What I want to say is that if today they gave citizenship to those 100 000 non-citizens, that would mean giving them a chance to choose 10 parliamentary seats. And naturally all the conservative forces who would never get votes from that side are definitely not interested in losing those 10 seats.

[...]

**How would you explain the success of your party, the Centre Party, among the Russian-speaking electorate?**

[...] Russians came and expressed their protest: they didn't vote for Savisaar<sup>1</sup> and for our party, they supported our party in order to show how much they were against the other parties. [...] We need to be very cautious when we talk about our success: they are not voting for us, they are voting against someone else. [...] On the one hand our current success is a good thing because it keeps the social balance, but on the other hand it is bad, because we are centrists, maybe left-of-centre, but liberals in any case, and we find ourselves obliged to do the job of the leftist block. [...] I think that sooner or later a party will emerge that, either on a regional or on a community level, will attract the support of the Russian-speakers. Today the Centrists are not trying to express the opinion of the Russian-speakers, but to balance Estonians and non-Estonians [...]: today we are doing somebody else's job!

[Long off-record conversation that unfortunately cannot be reported]

**And what about the integration programme?**

We naturally are in favour of politics in this field and in favour of a programme. But when we saw that the new coalition prepared a document even worse than the previous one... That is, it openly states that [...] integration is exclusively the learning of the Estonian language. The philosophy is the following: there is an object and a subject. The non-Estonians are the object, and we, the legislators, are the subject: we decide and dispose, they can only accept it and we will also give them marks. Do they have any right of choice?

CHAPTER III. Dmitrii Linter. A monologue.

*In which the author meets the representative of the organisation Nochnoy Dozor and recedes to the background in the face of her interlocutor's flow of figures, data, rage, activism and perspiration.*

There are two modalities of state governance: the stabilisation modality and the destabilisation modality. Our government's system of governance is built on stabilisation through destabilisation, i.e.

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<sup>1</sup> Edgar Savisaar is the leader of the Estonian Keskerakond (Centre Party) and currently the mayor of Tallinn.

**Comment [FJ13]:** It is surprising how openly Efendiev speaks of his own party as a protest group without any real agenda. It would be very interesting to know what he told you 'off the record'!

**Comment [IS14]:** Let's hope it's not gonna be nationalist.

they constantly destabilise the Russian *obshchina* and the Russian-speaking minority, by undertaking a series of actions to suppress this minority, in order to completely neutralise all the activists who could come out of its environment. [...] I, for example, don't feel at all loyal, because this is, as I've often said before, a criminal government. [...]

In reality there was no such thing as an 'integration process', there only was the 'blabla' of the EU, here they stole the money destined for integration projects and divided it up among themselves, and thus no integration process was seriously undertaken. On the contrary, programmes of assimilation were carried out that should have transformed the Russians into Estonians, or at least into people who would have been in a position of dependence towards the Estonian government. [...] That's why the Estonian state apparatus prevented the people with a different point of view from realising their political ambitions to form political parties and civil society organisations; that's why conditions have been established under which now there are no Russian-speaking politicians in the political environment and there is no [Russian-speaking] political elite; that's why a certain idea sprang up, that we call 'Estonianness' (*Estonkost'*), according to which a person who does not share a certain conception of the structure of the Estonian state cannot access either the governmental system, or the system of influence, and not even the system of political debate.

What they offer to us, being citizens, is to be represented by a handful of MPs who in fact do not solve the problem. Recently in the biggest Russian-speaking party, the Centre Party, among the 16 people who formed the party board of directors, there was not a single Russian. Only after we started an information campaign about [it], two [Russian-speakers] were appointed. [...]

The Estonian Republic is young and does not understand democratic rules: for them democracy is a way to strengthen the national tendencies and suppress dissent. It's a technology for the destruction of dissent, but it is by no means a system of government, it is all only a 'blablabla'. [...] But now let's go back to our figures: the level of education among the Estonian youth nowadays is twice as high as among Russians; more or less 65% of prison inmates are Russian; 85% of drug addicts (it was 90% until recently) are Russians; 90% of people infected with HIV are Russians; and they only make up 3% of the power organs. [...] Till now, in the course of the last 20 years, there was not a single Russian-speaking minister, apart from Efendiev, the former minister of nationalities ... but he is a Tatar! [...]

**Comment [IS15]:** That's it, I am immediately pulled into the story. Evil Estonians suppressing innocent Russians! Regardless of how accurate this is, the narrative is powerful.

**Comment [IS16]:** Could this apply to the States? Random thought.

**Comment [BS17]:** HA!

You said that it is called 'glass ceiling'. When is it dangerous for those who are above it? When the pressure from below grows and the ceiling breaks and kills all who were sitting on it! [...]

Our ambitions now are higher than simply becoming MPs. [...] They say 'build your party, register, participate in elections', but for what? You [the Estonians] built your state only for yourself, now you'll work alone in it: we will live separately, we will create our own *obshchina*, our own organisations. [...] If Russia won't support us, we will find people who do, in the EU. [...] Many of those who took part in the 2007 events<sup>2</sup> were aged 14-15, now they are 17-18. They won't shy away from street demonstrations, they will be more active, they don't have a guilt complex, they were born here in independent Estonia and don't understand why they should pay debts that are not theirs. [...] They'll be more radical. [...]

We wanted to contribute something to this state. But now it's all another matter: we want to be left in peace and to live our parallel life, have our parallel institutions.

**And do you think that this will be possible in practice?**

Of course not! But we want anyway to do our parallel things. After all, why should we cooperate? We tried and we were put in prison. [...] We don't want to start an open conflict: we don't have the resources for that. We will start by building our parallel institutions that will get stronger, and we will make them stronger. [...] And of course this will inevitably lead to a conflict, but, as for now, we don't see the conflict, we see the possibility of influencing the process, we have friends in the EU and in Russia, and there, there are much more influential people.

**Licia Cianetti**

**Comment [IS18]:** Young people fighting for a cause, so noble and romantic.

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<sup>2</sup> In April 2007 the controversial governmental decision to relocate the Soviet-time World War II memorial statue of the Bronze Soldier from the centre of Tallinn to a military cemetery sparked violent protests among the Estonian Russian-speakers. These events are also known as 'the Bronze Night'.

## Cirkus America and Other Stories

### *Selected Criticism on Petra Hůlová*

Petra Hůlová is the author of six novels<sup>1</sup>, and as one of the most imaginative contemporary Czech authors, her novels have received a widely varying critical response. Some of the reviews have been particularly perceptive and ingenious, but some indicate that the critic concerned has not put his/her mind to actually reading the book, or has failed to understand the main themes and devices employed by Hůlová. Some reviewers have found Hůlová linguistically and stylistically difficult; for example, Marta Ljubková defines *Umělohmotný třípokoj* as having a 'coded message' and constituting 'lexical and stylistic exercises for a titillating theme'.<sup>2</sup> Ljubková considers Hůlová's *Umělohmotný třípokoj* mental gymnastics, particularly targeted at 'intellectual readers' and not at the so-called common reader. It is true that Hůlová's works are open to multiple interpretations, and that they are linguistically complex, but that does not mean that they are aimed at a particularly exclusive group of readers. It appears that Ljubková has little faith in the mental abilities of the average Czech reader: if she, the literary critic, did not understand Hůlová, then it is impossible for anyone else to understand her either. Ljubková, who has reviewed all of Hůlová's novels, might well discourage potential readers. She also finds it difficult to express her own views in coherent, plain Czech, for example, in her review of *Paměť mojí babičce*: 'Unquestionable exoticism releases the writer to fabricate: the text is not shackled down (nor does it falsely enchant) by would-be autobiographicality.'<sup>3</sup> Some other Czech reviewers suffer from a tendency to make statements that they later do not support. For example, Ondřej Horák alleges that in *Stanice tajga* Hůlová uses 'tricks from *Trivialliteratur*', but he fails to give an example of such tricks.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Paměť mojí babičce* (Mémorial for My Grandmother, 2002), *Přes matný sklo* (Through Frosted Glass/Through a Glass Darkly, 2004), *Cirkus Les Mémoires* (Les Mémoires Circus, 2005), *Umělohmotný třípokoj* (Plastic Two-Bedroom Flat, 2006), *Stanice tajga* (Taiga Station, 2008), *Strážci občanského dobra* (Guardians of the Civil Good, 2010). All were published in Prague by Torst.

<sup>2</sup> Ljubková, 'O příliš zakódovaném poselství', A2 49 (2006) <http://www.advojka.cz/archiv/2006/49/o-prilis-zakodovanem-poselstvi> and 'Rozpohybování cest', *Souvislosti* 2 (2008) <http://www.souvislosti.cz/clanek.php?id=767>.

<sup>3</sup> Ljubková, 'Otázka kompozice', *Literární noviny* 46/2002, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Horák, 'Být naivní jako Dán v tajze', *Literární noviny*, 22 May 2010, p. 15.

What seems to be especially difficult for reviewers to grasp is the role that irony (narratorial irony as well as authorial self-irony) plays in Hůlová's novels. In the case of her latest novel, *Strážci občanského dobra*, a story of too keen a Communist, only Zdenko Pavelka comments on Hůlová's use of 'brutal irony', whereas Horák merely suspects that the work could be ironic.<sup>5</sup> All the other critics seem to consider *Strážci občanského dobra* from the point of view of their own experiences of Communist times. They reduce what was supposed to be a satirical portrayal of a crazed politicized individual into a more or less realistic portrayal of socialist Czechoslovakia and of the capitalist Czech Republic. Another novel that received similar treatment was *Umělohmotný třípokoj*, which the Czech writer and journalist Markéta Pilátová saw as duplicating narratives of the kind that one reads in women's magazines.<sup>6</sup> Yet Pilátová does not mention that the narrative in *Umělohmotný třípokoj* frequently ridicules the stories in women's magazines: Pilátová confuses imitation with parody.

Apart from having problems with her language or with understanding her irony, Hůlová's critics have also made blatant mistakes in their reviews: for example, Kateřina Kirkosová claims that *Stanice tajga* has four narrators.<sup>7</sup> The chapter titles do indeed display the names of four characters, but their thoughts are actually mediated by an omniscient narrator rather than four first-person narrators. Had Kirkosová read the novel more carefully, she would have noticed that, apart from the four 'narrators', the thoughts of many other characters are also mediated in the narrative.

When reading reviews of Hůlová's works, one encounters numerous references to the fact that she studied 'Culturology' in Prague. However, Hůlová's use of ethnography in her fiction is actually marginal. Certainly, there is something of an ethnographic angle in *Paměť mojí babičce*, and in *Stanice tajga* she more or less ridicules ethnographical practices in the character of the Danish academic Erske. It seems that reviewers, having discovered in the blurbs that she read Mongolian Studies and Culturology at university, decided that it was reason enough to call her novels

**Comment [VP19]:** Considering the obviously fictional (and dystopian) setting of *Strážci občanského dobra*, this is truly a baffling position to take.

<sup>5</sup> Pavelka, 'Brutální ironie Petry Hůlové', *Právo*, 4 June 2010 <http://www.novinky.cz/kultura/salon/202186-brutalni-ironie-petry-hulove.html> and Horák, 'Román o normalizaci patří do literární "šedé zóny"', *Hospodářské noviny*, 5 May 2010 <http://kultura.ihned.cz/c1-43582210-roman-hulove-o-normalizaci-patri-do-literarni-sede-zony>.

<sup>6</sup> Pilátová, 'Svět podle št'astné kurvy', *Respekt* 45 (2006), p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Kirkosová, 'Dlouhá jízda po transsibiřské magistrále', *Host* 8 (2008), pp. 48–49.

'ethnographical'.<sup>8</sup> Even if it were true, it would reveal little about the authorial approach in her novels.

All in all, it is evident that many of the reviews of Hůlová have been somewhat unprofessional: badly written, reductive and containing mistakes that would not have been there if the reviewer had concentrated on reading the novel. The worst case was a product of the novelist Bára Gregorová, who in her review of *Cirkus Les Mémoires* decided to change the title of the book, both in the text proper and in the bibliographical details at the end.<sup>9</sup> One wonders how many readers of Gregorová's review actually went to bookshops and asked for 'the new Hůlová book, *Cirkus America*'.

**Ilona Pallasvuo**

**Comment [VP20]:** The ethnographic sticker is a rather unfortunate marketing tactic for Hůlová's books, which will inevitably leave readers disappointed, seeing that, as you point out, only two of her novels engage with the concept of 'ethnography.' This may also be part of the reason why some of her other novels have been poorly received, because her first novel, whether in itself or in the way it was presented to the public, created a strong expectation for the continuation of this 'ethnographic' brand of writing.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Horák's review of *Stanice* (mentioned above) and Tereza Horvathová, 'Pragomongolia Petry Hůlové', *Babylon*, 25 November 2002, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Gregorová, 'Hůlové americký román honí mnoho témat', *Hospodářské noviny*, 28 November 2005, p. 12.



## The Enforcement of Corporate Governance Codes in the EU, with a Focus on the Czech Republic

Although all EU member states have adopted corporate governance codes, the enforcement of these codes and their objectives depends on a wide spectrum of factors and thus remains problematic. I believe that the major factor that determines their enforcement is the legal and institutional framework regarding corporate governance. I am going to illustrate my point by taking the Czech Republic as an example, and contrasting it with other EU member states.

One of the major legal factors which has an impact on the enforcement of the codes is whether they were established as a soft law or hard law within national legal systems, which determines the possible sanctions for a breach. In one extreme, some of the systems promote the codes by institutionalizing them as a hard law, which makes them binding and enforceable. In the other extreme, there are systems in which the code is considered a soft law, and hence merely a quasi-legal instrument that has little legal binding force. All EU member states use a system on the scale between these two extremes.

The Czech Corporate Governance Code is not enacted as a binding law. But the Directive 2006/46/EC was transposed in 2009 by the amendment to the Act on Business Activities on the Capital Market<sup>1</sup> and this act requires companies to prepare an annual report, which must contain information about the corporate governance code which is binding to them, or which they comply with.

The Spanish system for enhancing the Spanish Corporate Governance Code, by contrast, is considered to be the most regulatory system in the EU. According to a recent study, the strategy to improve corporate governance by self-regulation and by non-binding recommendations created by working groups appointed by the Spanish government failed in Spain.<sup>2</sup> The Spanish parliament reacted to this situation by adopting the so-called Transparency Act in 2003, which established a binding framework concerning good corporate governance practices in Spanish legislation.<sup>3</sup>

The study also explains that the UK model, in contrast to the Spanish one, does not put companies under great pressure to comply

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<sup>1</sup> Act No. 230/2009 Coll.; the Act No. 256/2004 Coll., as amended.

<sup>2</sup> DG Internal Market and Services, *Study on Monitoring and Enforcement practices in Corporate Governance in the Member States*, Legal Analysis September 2009, p. 366.

<sup>3</sup> DG Internal Market and Services, *Study on Monitoring and Enforcement practices in Corporate Governance in the Member States*, Legal Analysis, September 2009, p. 366.

with the UK Corporate Governance Code, especially in the short term. I agree with the argument of the Spanish Association for Business Accounting and Administration that 'in spite of the enforcement system in the UK being more transparent and independent and being more developed than the enforcement system in Spain, each system could be adequate for the existing historical, legal, economic and political conditions of each country.'<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it cannot be affirmed that one system is more effective than the other; the question rather is whether such a legal framework is a suitable one for the particular country.

'The business communities of the EU member states that were part of the Communist Bloc are unused to adhere to soft laws, as they are suspicious of its merits.' That is why governance matters are regulated in detail in Czech law, especially in the Commercial Code and acts related to the capital market. There is a similar situation in the other central and eastern EU member states. In the words of Karol M. Klimczak, a member of the Kozminski Center for Corporate Governance in Warsaw: 'I think the main barrier is that market participants do not understand how the corporate governance codes would benefit them. Many of the recommendations are taken from Anglo-Saxon countries and do not match our environment.'<sup>5</sup>

In the Czech Republic, as well as in the other EU member states, companies try to avoid the pressure exerted by legal and monitoring systems by complying with the code in a merely formal manner. According to Maria Fotaki of Athens University, 'companies claim to follow the Code, but they display only formal compliance.'<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to the Czech Republic and Greece, the 2009 Study on Monitoring and Enforcement Practices in Corporate Governance in EU Member States argues that the ability to create an awareness of the Corporate Governance Code was reached in Finland, although with certain deficiencies.<sup>7</sup> The Director of the Central Chamber of Commerce in Finland, Leena Linnainmaa, identified some of these deficiencies in an interview I conducted with her in March 2010: 'Naturally, there may be some cases in which companies (or rather individuals within the companies) are not so eager to disclose the

**Comment [MT21]:** This is very weak feedback from the Kozminski Centre. The Berlin Wall came down 21 years ago. 'Our environment' [Poland] includes a lot of investors from 'Anglo-Saxon' countries [USA and Britain]. This statement needs challenging, it reads, 'I think the main barrier to hard Corporate Governance Law in Eastern European business models include kick backs and bribes in the revenue model'.

**Comment [MT22]:** What does 'formal compliance' mean in this case? This statement needs challenging. Is Fotaki saying that 'soft' Corporate Governance laws are ignored by companies?

<sup>4</sup> Spanish Association for Business Accounting and Administration, *Enforcement in the EU*, 2004, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Email from the member of the Kozminski Center for Corporate Governance in Warsaw, Karol M. Klimczak, to myself, April 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Email from the member of the department of the Athens University of Business and Economics, Maria Fotaki, to myself, April 2010.

<sup>7</sup> DG Internal Market and Services, *Study on Monitoring and Enforcement practices in Corporate Governance in the Member States*, Appendix 2, September 2009, p. 32.

remuneration systems very thoroughly. But the new Finnish Corporate Governance Code will make these neglects more difficult.’<sup>8</sup>

As we can see, Finnish institutions are able to react to shortcomings quickly. Besides the legal framework, the institutional framework is another important factor to influence the enforcement of corporate governance codes. In the Czech Republic, there is no official body responsible for monitoring and updating the Code, and so far there has been a lack of enforcement of the Code by public or private authorities.<sup>9</sup> The Securities Commission ceased to exist before it was able to enforce international standards of corporate governance. As a consequence, there are no formal sanctions for the breach of the Code’s regulations. The Czech National Bank supervises the capital market, but the Act on the Czech National Bank<sup>10</sup> does not impose any responsibilities regarding the Czech Corporate Governance Code. As a consequence, the Czech National Bank has remained passive in promoting the best corporate governance practices. The Czech Republic should follow the example of a state like Bulgaria, which does not have a long tradition of promoting the best corporate governance practices, but where a body to monitor and encourage good corporate governance practices was established in 2009.

In my opinion, the key to the enforcement of corporate governance codes is the ability of the legislators to develop a legal and institutional framework which will fit the conditions it functions in. What is positive is that most EU member states are increasingly aware of this. [The Czech Republic is lagging behind in this process, and it is necessary for it to initiate significant reforms in order to make the Czech Corporate Governance Code a “living instrument” that has the potential to upgrade corporate governance practices and thus to benefit Czech society.

**Comment [MT23]:** I read in today’s Czech papers that the Czech Republic doesn’t hurry to enforce its own tax regulations either. It was graded 167<sup>th</sup> fastest of the 183 countries surveyed by the World Bank.

**Vladimír Ambruz**

<sup>8</sup> Email from The Director of the Central Chamber of Commerce in Finland, Ms Linnainmaa, to myself, March 23, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> DG Internal Market and Services, *Study on Monitoring and Enforcement practices in Corporate Governance in the Member States*, Legal Analysis, September 2009, p. 69.

<sup>10</sup> Act 6/1993 Coll.

TRANSLATION

**Je večer mlha padá**

J. H. Krchovsky

Je večer mlha padá  
a já se hrabu v jídle  
a bolejí mě záda  
od hospodský židle

Konečně jsem sám  
v osamění plachém  
co jsem chtěl to mám  
tak teď se klepu strachem

Snědl jsem kus filé  
a páteří i s kostí  
začíná defilé  
madame Úzkosti

Divně skřípe v hodinách  
a listí chrástí po římse  
stíny se plazej po stěnách  
třesu se, rozpadám, bořím se!

Voda pleská o vanu  
a svíce se svíjí  
záclony vlají v průvanu  
obrazy zděšeně vyjí

...Je noc, opona padá  
za rakví hrstka hlíny  
peřinou zatěžkám záda  
a přikryju se stíny  
usínám...

**It's Evening and Fog Is Falling**

Translated by Michael Tate

It's evening and fog is falling  
I play with my food  
feeling my back bones aching  
from sitting on the pub stool

The awkward loneliness  
I wanted appears at last  
and afterwards  
the shivers come fast

I have eaten a fish  
the bones the whole damned thing  
Lady Darkness has arrived  
now the parade can begin

The clock grinds strangely weird  
leaves brush against the ledge  
shadows sneak along the walls  
I rattle, skid right off the edge

Water drips into the bath  
and the candle sputters light  
curtains quiver in the draught  
the pictures scream in fright

...it's night, the curtain falls  
like loose soil behind a grave  
I pull the quilt above my back  
and covering myself in shadows  
fall asleep...

**Comment [VP24]:** This is an excellent translation which manages very effectively to preserve the rhyme scheme and rhythm of the original! It's interesting however that you decided to translate the title as 'It's Evening and Fog Is Falling' rather than 'It's Evening Fog Is Falling,' adding the conjunction 'and'. Is this to make the title sound more accessible? More natural? Or for purposes of rhythm in the first line? In Czech the absence of 'and' sounds just as unfamiliar and non-standard as it would in English.

TRANSLATION

## **Kdo na moje místo?**

Petr Bezruč

Tak málo mám krve a ještě mi teče  
z úst.  
Až bude růst  
nade mnou tráva, až budu hnít,  
kdo na moje místo,  
kdo zdvihne můj štít?  
V dým zahalen vítkovských pecí jsem stál,  
noc zřela mi z očí, plam z nozdry mi vál,  
nech zářilo slunce, nech večer se šeril,  
já semknutou brvou ty vrahy jsem měřil:  
ty bohaté židy, ty grófy ze šlachty,  
já škaredý horník, jak vyskočil z šachty.  
Nech diadém jednomu na skrání svítil,  
každý z nich upjatý pohled můj cítil,  
mou zařatou pěst, můj vzdor,  
hněv horníka z Beskyd a z hor.-  
Tak málo mám krve a ještě mi teče  
z úst.  
Až bude růst  
nade mnou tráva, až budu hnít,  
kdo místo mne na stráž,  
kdo zvedne můj štít?

## **Who Will Take My Place?**

Translated by Veronika Pehe

So little blood in me and still from my mouth  
it streams.  
When the grass green  
Grows above me, when to decay I yield,  
Who will take my place,  
Who will raise my shield?

Shrouded in smoke from the furnaces of Vítkov I stood,

Night beheld from my eyes, flames from my nares spewed,  
 Whether the sun shone or dusk grew into night,  
 I measured those murderers with my brow wrought tight:  
 Those rich Jews and counts of noble line,  
 I, the ugly collier, as I'd sprung from the mine.  
 Though on one's temple a diamond flashed,  
 Each of them felt my look unabashed,  
 My clenched fist and my defiance,  
 The wrath of a miner from the Beskyd Mountains.

So little blood in me and still from my mouth  
 it streams.  
 When the grass green  
 Grows above me, when to decay I yield,  
 Who will take my place,  
 Who will raise my shield?

**Comment [MT25]:** Awesome translation!

## COMMENTARY

### **Why Bother with Bezruč?** *Reading Literature in a Historical Context*

Recently my translation of Petr Bezruč's poem *Kdo na moje místo?* (*Who Will Take My Place?*) was read by a disinterested student, who had no previous knowledge of Bezruč and his work, nor did he come from a Czech cultural context. His first reaction was to ask if I didn't find the poem somewhat antisemitic, to which there of course is no other reply than "Yes". The next question to follow would then naturally be, why read (and translate) a text which endorses an ideology which is so universally condemned in our culture? On the other hand, this reaction also prompted me to inquire whether Bezruč's opinions, so obviously unacceptable to a contemporary audience, disqualify him as a poet on an aesthetic level. In other words, should it matter to our enjoyment of Bezruč's poetry what political content it expresses?

There is no doubt that the poetry of Vladimír Vašek, who wrote under the pseudonym Petr Bezruč and published mainly in the first years of the twentieth century, is marked by a strong nationalist

**Comment [LJ26]:** While I really like the expression you use in your title, 'why bother with...?', I wonder to what extent 'enjoyment' is a relevant category. Just in that 'enjoyment' seems just one small reason of why you would want to bother with someone, and also a strangely apolitical notion within everything else you write.

programme and evinces antisemitic, as well as anti-German and anti-Polish sentiments. Nevertheless, Bezruč's firm place within the Czech literary canon was consolidated during the Communist era when he was championed as a voice of the working people. A decontextualized reading of *Who Will Take My Place*, which is neither aware of the political background of Bezruč's times, nor of his later critical reception, will inevitably produce the kind of reaction described above. It seems to me that this draws attention to the shortcomings of New Critical close-reading practices which advocate approaching a text with no background information about the author or his times, and which are still employed in the Anglo-American education system through such concepts as the "unseen extract."

This does not mean that I wish to advocate biographical readings of literary texts. Indeed in the case of Petr Bezruč, who set himself up as a "Silesian bard" or representative of the oppressed peoples of the region, the fact he was in real life a postal worker is more likely to confuse and distract the reader rather than provide an insight into how to approach his poetry. Neither do I wish to excuse Bezruč's racism through a crude historicism. Saying that such opinions were prevalent in Bezruč's time is not enough: the collection *Silesian Songs* was after all published after the 'Hilsner Affair' (a highly politicized trial of the Jew Leopold Hilsner who allegedly murdered a young gentile woman in 1899), which had whipped up antisemitic moods within Czech society, but had also produced more enlightened opinions which spoke out against the anti-Jewish subtext of the affair. But it is precisely because of such events that Bezruč's poetry should be read within its historical context, as it draws attention to and sheds light on these tensions within society at the time.

However, the fact that Bezruč does not go out of his way to hide his nationalist sentiments raises another interesting question for the kind of value the political content of his work offers. Deconstructive readings often tease out hidden meanings or ideologies from texts – one may recall Edward Said's analysis of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, which exposes the imperialist and colonial agenda behind the text, or Chinua Achebe's condemnation of the latent racism in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Just because Bezruč's racism is much less covert, just because we do not have to work hard to discover it – does that make his work less interesting as a topic of discussion simply because we cannot make it the point of a lengthy analysis to 'unmask' his problematic side? Even though it takes less effort to uncover the ideological content of Bezruč's works,

**Comment [IP27]:** This is interesting. What type of literary canon does he belong to nowadays?

**Comment [MT28]:** I think a contextualized reading of the poem might want to reflect on the title's similarity to 'Kde Domov Můj' and the rather un-pc later verses of that little ditty...

**Comment [LJ29]:** I agree – though from my own experience, new criticism (or its English form, practical criticism) is now mainly used as a tool/method, and no longer as an end in itself. As I've seen the opposite of what you're describing (students applying historical knowledge without being able to analyse the form/structure of a text), I think learning to read closely can still be helpful – if at all points closely linked to a more historical approach. Not that you said these approaches were mutually exclusive, but it's a shame if some people in the institutions do...

that does not mean they cannot be discussed in the same way we discuss Austen or Conrad.

We are after all talking about poetry, which addresses the reader not only politically, but also, and perhaps primarily, aesthetically. Even though his poetry will not speak to a contemporary audience ideologically, whether on the level of the anti-German, anti-Polish, antisemitic nationalist, or on the level of a working-class rebel advocating active class war (particularly in middle-class educational institutions), the fact that Bezruč is still taught and read today testifies to some sort of intrinsic literary qualities within his work. What exactly this 'literariness' is, and how we define it, is a topic for another discussion, but through my translation I hope to have captured at least some of the extraordinarily powerful language Bezruč employs to great dramatic effect, which is largely the reason why I felt attracted to the idea of translating *Kdo na moje místo* in the first place.

In conclusion, I do not wish to appear to say that the importance of some sort of abstract literary quality in Bezruč's work in any way justifies the author's political agenda. But understanding the historical context of works such as Bezruč's allows us to comprehend the moral universe of the time he was living in, and may prompt us to pass moral judgment a little less hastily and indiscreetly than simply dismissing his poetry as antisemitic and thus unworthy. An informed, critical approach to the historical context of a text should allow us to appreciate it as a work of literature. Bezruč should continue to be read, precisely because his work focuses greater concerns about the existence of literary quality and its relationship to politics, an issue which merits further discussion.

Veronika Pehe

**Comment [IP30]:** I guess it is difficult to see another side of Bezruč. Classics such as Austen and Conrad do not evoke only deconstructive, but many other kind of readings, too, since they are read by so many critics, whereas Bezruč is relatively unknown (at least outside Czech circles).

**Comment [LJ31]:** If these are to be separated at all...

**Comment [LJ32]:** Yes! Or perhaps we should speak of the 'political' universe of his time to which 'moral judgements' of our time seem completely inadequate - they seem to be based on a vague notion of ahistorical universal morality.

**Comment [IS33]:** Alice Kaplan (Duke University) discusses this issue in her memoir, 'French Lessons'. Being of Jewish descent, she wrote her dissertation on fascist writers. Kaplan explores the relationship between (undeniable) literary merit and (revolting) ideology in the works of Céline. Do look it up, reader.

**Comment [BS34]:** Yes, yes!



## BOOK REVIEW

*Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry* by L. M. Agustín, London: Zed Books Ltd, 2007, 248 pp.

Agustín's book originated in the mid 90s with her outreach work on various projects (with asylum seekers, in HIV/AIDS prevention, studies of tourism and migrant sex workers). Her fieldwork was carried out with migrant sex workers in Western Europe, but not exclusively. In Agustín's eloquent chapters, she refers to sex workers coming from Central and Eastern Europe. The examples she uses illustrate the post-1989 boom of sex labourers from South-East Europe (the case of Albanians in Italy) and Eastern Europe (sex workers from Ukraine, Poland, Romania and Moldova in the UK) migrating to the West.

Her main argument is that sex labourers (of all migrant workers) are often the ones marginalised and infantilised as poor victims without agency. This is due, on the one hand, to the helpers' governmentality in the rescue industry (paid or voluntary jobs in Immigration, Social Services, NGOs) who think they are better equipped to rescue the poor. On the other hand, scholars of migration studies do not include sex labourers in their studies leaving that to the victims of the 'trafficking' field. This trend explains why sex labourers are often portrayed as victims of trafficking.

Agustín contends that in the changing climate of global flows, *transnationalism*, and *cosmopolitanism* an 'emphasis on mobility and flexibility vs. identity and fixed location' allows a shift in the mentality of the helpers and researchers (Agustín, 2007: 45). For example, she argues that *cosmopolitanism* - 'a thing of the richer' (Agustín, 2007: 44) includes poor travellers, such as working class migrants with low-prestige jobs. Implicitly, migrant sex workers are cosmopolitans too; as empowered as the rich who choose to do something legal or illegal during their migration.

The originality of Agustín's research lies in her ability to take a post-colonial stand to expose the discourses on the conventional use of *services* (domestic, caring and sex selling services). For example, demand countries such as the UK are the 'pull factor' for domestic, caring and sex work, but the ever changing contexts of families, gender relations, sexualities, consumer attitudes and ideas about what is and what is not classed as 'acceptable work' are changing. Yet, the UK government fails to accept these changes and applies one

criterion for domestic/care services and another for sex work. Therefore, she argues that only when governments will include sexual labour in their formal services' accounting systems the sex workers' situation will improve in all aspects (e.g. their own safety).

The clarity in her genealogical approach is revealed by her systematic deconstruction of both 'prostitution' and the 'rise of the social', which explains how a Victorian construction of a fuzzy category 'prostitution' has contributed to the creation of a niche industry of rescuing prostitutes. The ascent of the *social* originated with the idea of philanthropy. Middle-class women were believed to be most able to help the poor, including prostitutes. Prostitutes needed to be put under systematic *social* control with the view to eradicate their vile behaviour. Although that failed by the end of the nineteenth century prostitutes were no longer vile and disgusting beings, but poor working-class women needing rescuers.

There may be more reasons that motivated Agustín to take an anthropological approach which encapsulated both her ontological view and the empirical work that was to follow. Two reasons for choosing the participant-observer role might explain why. Being an insider of both groups (rescuers and migrants) she questioned the attitudes of those subjects who attached the stigma to the stigmatised migrant sex workers, and this gave her insights into the words and actions of both. By shifting her gaze from migrants onto helpers and trying to understand each one from their own standpoints, Agustín gathered information until now absent from scholarship on commercial sex and migration.

Some suggestions are worthy of consideration. First, Agustín may wish to consider placing her findings within the broader context of 'new and historically specific conditions of possibility' (Bernstein, 2007: 485). The era of new technologies and internet allows the sex industry to grow and become mainstream as a reaction to poorly paid jobs, unaffordable costs of urban living, high levels of mass consumption, and more recently in the United Kingdom, student debt on the rise, which becomes one of the 'push factors' for students to practise commercial sex.

Second, looking at the past to learn how the 'prostitution' discourse came about gives the reader an understanding into why low-paid workers who are pushed into sex work end up with rescuers. Going forward however, we find explanations as to why men and women from privileged classes find themselves involved in sex work. An area that needs to be further researched.

**Comment [LJ35]:** As well as escorting services – this seems to be quite popular among female students in the UK.

**Comment [LC36]:** It's interesting to see how a similar point about prostitution and 'conditions of possibility' was made already in 1894 by George Bernard Shaw in his preface to 'Mrs Warren's profession'. To give you a taste: 'For the alternatives offered are not morality and immorality, but two sorts of immorality. The man who cannot see that starvation, overwork, dirt, and disease are as anti-social as prostitution – that they are the vices and crimes of a nation, and not merely its misfortunes – is (to put it as politely as possible) a hopelessly Private Person.'

Lastly, Agustín makes references to the migrant sex workers from South-East and Eastern Europe. However, more in-depth studies on the specifics of these regional networks and the extent to which they contribute to the growth of sex consumption in the West and implicitly the sex industries in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe would enlighten the reader on the increased wave of migration and the conditions under which sex labourers come from Eastern to Western Europe to engage in sex work. In all, this volume goes straight to my reference library on sex labour and it is essential reading for scholars, students and those interested in migration and sex work.

**Comment [LJ37]:** Thanks - also for the references - this is really interesting!

**Iulius-Cezar Macarie**

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## EXHIBITION REVIEW

## Cultural Clash *'Lost in Translation?', an Exhibition*

Moving from one socio-cultural system to another implicates several stages of adaptation. When an individual is disconnected from his comfort zone and inserted into a strange incomprehensible reality, his established patterns and paradigms are challenged by new bewildering situations. In an exhibition at Riverside Studios on the banks of the Thames, Czech and British visual artists express how they got 'lost in translation' when they detached themselves from their stable world and faced the transformations of their essences through another culture.

Culture is a complex of symbols, myths and cognitive structures through which people's perceptions of the world are built. Language, for example, is one of the most significant cultural elements that enable the individual to categorize and understand reality. When crossing cultural boundaries, the individual cannot immediately recognize functions and rituals of the unknown culture and gets confused in time and space, or 'lost in translation' according to the Czech curator based in the UK, Michaela Freeman.

Perceptions of past, present and future are perturbed and schedules unsettled. The individual wakes up in the darkness of an unidentified room and cannot even remember in which language his dreams were set. Going around the city he constantly has experiences of *déjà vu* in the weirdest of spaces. This process can be traumatic or even a way to insanity. At the same time, during a cultural systematic clash one's imagination and creativity can achieve a great climax to be allegorically registered in a piece of art. The visual expressions of the transition between systems vary from self-conscious constructions to surreal abstract insights.

Departing from the motherland means to cut the umbilical cord that connects the person to the nation. For those artists who emigrated from Czechoslovakia to the so-called 'West', leaving their country meant also inverting the ideological dichotomy of the time. In her contemporary photography Lenka Drga explores the fusion of politics and forms representing what she calls the fossilization of functionalist socialist architecture. The beautiful pinkish-blue idealistic background of her picture is scratched by what appear to be

**Comment [LJ38]:**

Is it then even possible to speak of essence? Isn't the implication rather that their previous environment had shaped them just as much as their new environment does now?

**Comment [FJ39]:** This is true to an extent that it has almost become a cliché; for instance, the abundance of canonised literature to emerge from the Habsburg fin-de-siècle is almost always related to its ethnic and cultural diversity.

**Comment [IS40]:** Curious, this image resurfacing again. Have you been able to cut the umbilicus, guys? To be born into, say, London?

**Comment [LJ41]:** Not sure about a biologising and gendered metaphor like this.

**Comment [FJ42]:** I wouldn't say this is necessarily the case. Often geographic distance from one's 'motherland' leads to a greater emotional attachment to the nation than before (see, for example, Irina Sadovina's short story in this issue).

failed human constructions. In the same political context, Jan Mladovski's recent photography of a 'východ' sign in a luxury shoe store in a cheesy commercial style could not represent better his meaningful memory, as in Czech 'východ' means both 'exit' and 'east'. Do we need today to 'východ' consumerism?

After arriving in another country, the sense of freedom is rapidly substituted by fear and suspicion. All the people seem to be looking at you and paying attention to your behavior. They follow you. You fear your shadow. Even the street dog follows you. Walking alone at night becomes highly frightening. The adventures in nocturnal landscapes took Hana Vojáčková to a reinterpretation of the story of Little Red Riding Hood. The big bad wolf is a hungry street dog and the city is a concrete jungle where the artist is inspired to challenge her fears.

When getting involved in a different culture the individual has access to an infinite number of new ideas and thoughts. The hurricane of information to be processed makes the human mind feel it is being blown by the wind. One can hesitate and reject all the uncertainties of the external world. In his work Jan Lesak says 'shut the door please'. What gets locked inside is a dark mystery. On the contrary, the work of Marta Daeuble represents the surreal external world. Her collage shows an invisible black and white woman as a metaphor of the foreigner lost in the brainstorming of identities represented by letters and stamps.

Unsatisfied with human incapacity to deal with infinity the individual attempts to accumulate, mix and perform all the surrounding realities. The incessant drawings from the everyday multiple life of Alena Dostalova increased her head to a disproportional size compared to her body in her self-portrait. How many gigabytes does the human brain support? For Maruska Polakova we have an entire internal universe where new stars can be discovered or formed by new cultures. Her quasi-expressionist drawings map the geographic data of coordinates that connect the significant places of her life. For others, a new culture can offer a big bang in people's internal universe.

An explosion is what is caused in one's mind when bombarded by another culture. It may temporally delete and reset any preconceptions and biases. The individual becomes a child re-learning everything with another cultural perspective. However, vestiges of the national culture can be recovered by deep self-investigation. Living in the UK, the cultural roots of Tereza Buskova's childhood emerged, a rich Czech mythology that had been asleep.

**Comment [LC43]:** Maybe it would have been worth exploring both sides of this double meaning: not only 'východ' as 'exit' (from consumerism or from socialism into consumerism?), but also 'východ' as 'east' (which is only mentioned in the text). The sign "East" on a luxury/cheesy shop window seems quite a strong (oxymoronic?) image.

**Comment [BS44]:** I can also imagine it working the other way round: arrival in a new place could be a generally anxious experience, followed by a growing comfort and feeling of freedom over time. I think the key with these immigration experiences is that there is no single model. Each set of internal and external circumstances affecting any individual must result in a unique experience. Of course there will be similarities among individual experiences, but there will also be vast differences, as the varied works you describe in this show seem to indicate.

The female nude appears in her composition as a symbol of the pure natural life in the countryside. Moravian rites of passage and folk traditions are part of her romanticisation of the past.

Yearning for the past can abruptly emerge. Any object, image, aroma, echo may be reminiscent of the homeland and cause nostalgia through the impossibility of reliving the past. Renata Kudlacek tries to assuage her nostalgia by reconstructing her memories. She photographs on Polaroid film bunches of flowers on London bridges just as her father did in former Czechoslovakia.

Suddenly, the new culture is not strange anymore. Following the short circuit, both cultures stabilize and start to coexist. After having the mental space invaded by new myths, understandings and ways of thinking, the individual will never be the same one-cultured creature. Breaking boundaries helps to avoid social habitus, imposed structures, stereotypes and cultural misconceptions. Furthermore, standing between cultures, mixing and playing with them maximizes the possibilities of finding answers for the deepest existential investigations.

After getting lost in the work of these post-lost visual artists, one can only start looking for boundaries to break and borders to cross, in order to explode one's own internal universe, to access the unconscious and to begin to engage with a new socio-cultural environment.

**Sander Roberto Maurano Filho**

**Comment [IS45]:** This threefold project is quite ambitious. Exploring the inner and the outer world, even as the universe folds into itself and changes with every moment... But maybe this IS what one needs to do, and indeed can NOT help doing - to choose to be transformed to face the tension, live with it whole-heartedly.

## FILM REVIEW

**'One Hundred Fish'**

The things that can seem the most natural, the most obvious, the most simple to one group of people can often be precisely those things that are the hardest to communicate to another group. In *Pudana: The Last of the Line* (Anastasia Lapsui and Markku Lehmuskallio, 2010), the protagonist, Neko, experiences a cultural interaction characterised by this failure of communication. Sent away from her native Nenets community in the Yamal Peninsula of Northern Siberia to a Soviet-run school, Neko is forced to adapt to a radically different way of life.

Around halfway through the film, a Soviet teacher attempts to explain to Neko the idea of counting. For a Western audience, as for those educated in the Soviet system, the idea of numbers can exist quite independently, in abstract, as a mere idea, which can, but does not have to, be applied to specific objects in the real world. 'Ten', for example is a word in and of itself. To explain what 'ten' means without resorting to concrete examples, however, is virtually impossible. Moreover, for Neko, number cannot be anything other than a property of material objects. While her teacher encourages her to count in abstract - 'one, two, three, four...' - Neko resists assimilation into the Soviet system of intellectualised abstractions, sticking instead to her own Nenets system - 'one hundred fish makes one deer.' This clash of idea-systems is central to *Pudana*: where the indigenous community's thought is characterised by generations-old traditions and a basis in lived experience, Soviet Russia represents the influence of European intellectual thought, imposed from without and above. Neko, last of her tribe, is caught between these two perspectives.

Neko's clan is well-known and respected among the Nenets. The story of the clan, with its totem, its songs and its prayers, culminates in Neko. She becomes a living symbol, invested with meaning and power. As a carrier of the clan's past, present and future, Neko is destined for greatness. Her leaving her family and going to school then takes on a larger significance. Even when separated from her community, Neko initially retains her Nenets self, bearing patiently the bullying and the isolation in a hostile environment. Her eventual escape from the Soviet village and her return home is a true Hero's Journey. When she receives a shamanic

**Comment [IP46]:** Here one could mention briefly Lehmuskallio and Lapsui's history as doc. film makers especially interested in indigenous peoples in the Northern Hemisphere.

drum from her grandfather, symbolising the fulfilment of her destiny, she is expected to have the power to match its own. But instead of becoming a powerful shaman, which would benefit her role as the hope of the people, Neko takes on the new name given to her by her Soviet teacher, puts the drum aside, and adapts rather well to Soviet reality. Her new name, Nadezhda, means 'hope' in Russian, and indeed she comes to realise not her Nenets destiny but the Soviet name imposed upon her: we are told that she eventually flourishes under the Soviet education system, and fulfils her teachers' hopes by learning to be a well-adjusted member of Soviet society.

Just like her grandmother, who connected the world of humans with the spirit world, Neko becomes a bridge between the Nenets community and the Soviet society. The process of change, of course, is difficult and turbulent, since it involves no less than an undermining and a possible destruction of one's view of reality. In order to become a bridge, to live in between two worlds, one has to accept uncertainty and absence of security.

The laws of the society Neko enters are completely alien. Adjusting to them means accepting a new name, a foreign language and a different set of assumptions which construct a different reality. In the end, Neko/Nadezhda is able to internalize the conflicting narratives. Two worlds that seem mutually exclusive are unified to create a dual identity. As a narrator, Neko effortlessly switches back and forth between the two. **It seems that instead of engaging with the conflict, she is able to ignore it, to simply live with it.**

The film's story is presented in flashback, as told by a much older Neko, sat in her kitchen. Shot by a single camera in bright natural light, these sections of the film have a journalistic feel, as if Neko is part of the research of an oral historian. They bring the audience jarringly back to reality, or rather not to 'reality' as such, but to one specific reality (post-Soviet Russia), a reality whose existence has been shown to be mutually exclusive with that of the Nenets community. Even as the act of telling her story seems to allow Neko to recreate her indigenous identity, the viewer cannot escape the fact that this identity has been almost entirely subsumed into the collective identity of Soviet Russia. **The act of self-expression, in *Pudana*, is not a liberating act of self-(re-)discovery, but rather an intellectualisation of Neko's childhood, and - since the influence of Soviet Russia has been shown to be one of intellectualisation and abstraction - a further Russification.**

**Comment [IP47]:** But isn't this what people tend to do? Is there such a thing as a single identity? Or is it just that here the two identities or selves differ radically from each other, which makes Neko's life more difficult?

**Comment [LC48]:** This is a very good point!



By concentrating the complex dynamic between these two cultures into one single young girl, who manages to hold two conflicting narratives in her psyche at the same time, *Pudana* explores some of the most fundamental questions regarding the formation of identity.

*Pudana: The Last of the Line* screened at the London Film Festival in October 2010. It awaits UK distribution.

**Irina Sadovina & Philip Sayers**

**Commentators for this issue were:**

LC - Licia Cianetti

FJ - Felix Jeschke

LJ - Lisa Jeschke

ICM - Iulius-Cezar Macarie

IP - Ilona Pallasvuo

VP - Veronika Pehe

IS - Irina Sadovina

BS - Brian Stone

MT - Michael Tate

Feel free to write your own comments in the free space and pass them on to us to expand the discussion of these texts online, or simply add your comments directly on our blog: <http://journalmarginalia.wordpress.com/>



**[marginalia]** welcomes contributions of 1,000 words or less, preferably relating to the extended regions of Central, East and South-East Europe (but not exclusively) in any of the following forms:

- Academic work (abbreviated or in extract form)
- Journalistic writing
- Reviews of exhibitions, films, plays, etc.
- Short Stories
- Travel writing
- Poetry
- Translations into English

Please contact the editorial board with any questions or submissions: **[marginalia.ssees@gmail.com](mailto:marginalia.ssees@gmail.com)**

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The next issue is due to come out in March 2011, so start writing and get in touch!

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