

viewing Sapgir's poetry as free verse is not clear, but it does allow for the possibility of the deliberate deconstruction of metrical form, while at the same time privileging the rhythms of everyday speech. Other themes that are covered in greater or lesser detail include the relationship between Sapgir's writing for adults and his writing for children in respect of his use of the absurd and *zaum*'-like language, his affinity for the themes and techniques of 'Moscow conceptualism', the influence of pop-art on his work, Sapgir's Jewish heritage and the example of the Yiddish writer Ovsei Driz, whom Sapgir also translated, and parallels between Sapgir's poetry and the writing of Gertrude Stein.

Overall the book provides a compelling portrait of Sapgir as both a man and a poet, and a sensitive introduction to the circumstances in which he lived and worked.

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Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska and Elena Gapova, eds., *Over the Wall/After the Fall: Post-Communist Cultures through an East-West Gaze*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004, x+320 pp.

In the main, this collection delivers what the editors promise: essays that adopt approaches familiar in cultural studies, postcolonial studies and African American studies in order to inquire into recent or contemporary East European cultural phenomena – objects that, the editors fear, have been addressed by a scholarship 'more traditional ... than [that of] almost any comparable field'. The articles comprising the collection are further unified by the intent of focussing on 'race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationhood, dominance, resistance, and oppositional culture' (4). The authors' cultural backgrounds are diverse, we are told, though all have lived or worked in the West and know the customs and preoccupations of Western, especially United States, academe. Hence the 'east-west gaze' announced in the title.

The editors' introduction attributes to the contributing authors 'understandings of culture which must not be allowed to coalesce into a uniform definition' (4-5). Nonetheless, a definition is on offer, though not one that necessarily commands assent: 'We see culture as a mix of high and low

academic and popular productions and discourses reflecting social and historical change and as a realm where diversity and hybridity have always provided a constant, though often unacknowledged, undercurrent for more “traditional” paradigms of thinking’ (4). What are the ‘high popular productions and discourses’ whose existence this definition acknowledges? And what of the ‘productions and discourses’ that are neither academic, nor popular, but are usually identified as belonging to the category of ‘high’ art? Fortunately, though the definition appears to overlook them, the book itself does not: Wisława Szymborska, Frank Gehry’s Netherlands National Bank Building in Prague, and contemporary installation art in Bratislava figure as objects of analysis (see the contributions, respectively, of the editors themselves, David Houston and Paul Krainak).

Stylistically, the volume emphasises its determination to part with the generic conventions of the scholarly article. Confessional narrative in the first person embodies the principle of the contextual and inescapably subjective nature of utterances. An afterword attributed to a ‘Benni Goodman’ hovers between essay, fiction, and parody upon academic and literary prose. The dangers of mannerism and narcissism are averted, however, thanks to the interest and novelty of much of the book’s content and the incisive analysis that characterises several studies. For example, in a discussion titled ‘The Nation In Between; or, Why Intellectuals Do Things with Words’ Elena Gapova offers a nuanced account of the linked issues of national self-identification and language choice in Belarus, describing eloquently the interweaving of modernisation and the exercise of power by the ‘colonising’ centre that renders Russian culture mainstream and its Belarusian counterpart marginal. (The inverted commas are Gapova’s; they indicate her unease with the separation of coloniser from colonised that the viewpoint of postcolonial studies implies.)

Some studies offer insight into the detail of post-Soviet social transformations. Rainer Gries examines the 1992 revival of Club Cola, a product of the German Democratic Republic, shedding light not only on the seemingly paradoxical exploitation of nostalgia for a socialist past in the interests of commercial profit, but also on complex identity shifts that attend East Germans’ post-1989 accommodation to their new histories and geographies. Carol Silverman gives an account of the invention in socialist Bulgaria of a pseudo-folk tradition of polyphonic choral music that was

successfully marketed in Western countries as ethnographically authentic, archaic and mysterious. She draws attention to the attendant disregard for the actual monophonic musical practice of rural Bulgarians, and of the exploitation by the professionalised socialist music industry of peasant singers in general and women in particular.

Two essays address ‘unofficial cultures’ of the socialist period and their afterlife following 1989: Lisa Whitmore the *samizdat* tradition in the GDR, Mark Andryczyk various incarnations of oppositional culture in the Ukrainian city of L’viv.

Buildings are the objects in which Magdalena J. Zaborowska sees reflected post-socialist Poland’s coming to terms with its past and its capitalist present. Bill Johnston uses interview data to make observations about the teaching of English in Poland, invoking both Bakhtin and Foucault in an interpretation that (perhaps not altogether surprisingly) detects in the proliferation of English evidence of ‘linguistic neo-colonialism’ and ‘the continuing hegemony of core countries over those of the periphery’ (141). Halina Filipowicz uses the reception history of Polish productions of the United States playwright David Mamet’s play *Oleanna* (1992) as the cornerstone of her critique of Polish society, including its cultural elite, as illiberal, tradition-bound and anti-feminist. Věra Sokolová is less than optimistic about the status and prospects of women’s and gay rights in the Czech Republic, liberal legislation notwithstanding. Andaluna Borcila’s reading of United States television coverage of orphans in the Romania of Ceaușescu is marked by palpable *ressentiment* against the colonising vision of Western media. For Borcila such representations are ‘a symptom of both the bankruptcy and the persistence of a Cold War symbolic’ (44) and serve the maintenance of the ‘fiction of a shared community of “Eastern Europe”, defined as beyond the realm of Western normality’ and ‘in practice disabling’ (58-59). Anea Rosu discovers a similar reinforcement of stereotypes in Robert D. Kaplan’s travel book *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (1993).

For all its tendency to invoke “theory” even where it contributes little to the argument, and despite its sometimes mildly excessive tendentiousness, *Over the Wall* rewards its reader with valuable insights, especially where it engages in analysis of the ever fascinating particularity of societies and the cultures. Furthermore, the book serves the innately worthwhile objective of helping the subaltern speak – if only by giving presence in an English-

speaking academic environment to subject matters that generally go unremarked there.

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Jeff Love, *The Overcoming of History in 'War and Peace'*, Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2004. viii + 211 pages.

Anyone who has taught *War and Peace* at undergraduate level will be familiar with – may even have some sympathy for – complaints about the tendentiousness or tediousness of the ‘philosophical’ digressions in which Tolstoy lectures the reader on the nature of history. Tolstoy himself, relegating them to a separate appendix to the 1873 edition of the novel, seems to have had second thoughts, while Tolstoy criticism (after Isaiah Berlin and George Steiner) has seen them mainly as an illustration of the tensions between the novelist’s perception of the diversity of life and the historian’s attempt to confine it within a single unifying theory.

For Jeff Love, this is but one aspect of the conflict between scepticism and dogmatism that, together with a complex of related dichotomies (reason and consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, relative and absolute, finite and infinite), constitutes the dynamics of the novel. His aim is to demonstrate how the narrative strives to fashion a unity from these ‘protean and dynamic oppositions’ (p.1) and thus that the art of *War and Peace* ‘is no less a product of thought than the historical essays’ (p. 3). For good measure, his intention is also to trace the transformation of a family chronicle into an historical epic. This is a demanding and far-reaching agenda which involves the manipulation of highly abstract philosophical ideas as much as a close reading of the literary text, and no review can offer more than a drastic oversimplification. The first chapter begins with Prince Andrei at Schön Graben rejecting the assumption that generals control battles in ways reason can explain to confront the choice between scepticism and an ‘underlying dogmatism’ that accepts the existence of some ultimate order beyond rational explanation in the face of events we do not control. Chapter 2 transfers the focus to Pierre at Borodino, and through his confusion examines the limitations of a historical narrative which aims to impose order, reason and causality on such chaos. Tolstoy’s alternative, a