

Geschichte und kommunistische Gegenwart: Historiosophische Positionen und ihre narrative Präsentation in Essay und Roman der Volksrepublik Polen.

By Christoph Garstka. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016. 531 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Photographs. €75.00, hard bound.

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This absorbing book concerns the ways in which authors of historical fiction and historical essays in the middle years of the People's Republic of Poland made use of the past to represent, to criticize, to model, to transform—in short, to point at—the present. The book's wager is that these authors can be distributed across a historiosophical opposition: if one thinks history unfolds according to a teleological “master narrative,” then the present, via historical analogy, can be *made* to make sense; but if one thinks that history has no telos or truth, then historical discourse must properly tend towards play, towards the grotesque and the absurd, towards irony and metafiction. The opposition is Gombrowiczian in inspiration and Christoph Garstka takes it from a 1953 passage in the émigré writer's diary in which he suggests that communism and Catholicism, far from being unlike, are fundamentally similar in that both are founded upon a belief in truth. Witold Gombrowicz, opposing unbelief to belief, undoes the initial opposition, creating in turn a new, more productive one. Garstka adapts this tripartite scheme as an effective device for thinking about attitudes towards history.

Why history? Garstka's answer to this is that given Poland's nineteenth-century experience of statelessness and its occupation by imperialist neighbors in the mid-twentieth, Poles tend to seek to understand contemporary reality not through existing political institutions, but through history, more specifically, through the telling in the present of stories about the past. Garstka buttresses and enriches this truism via a foray into and sustained dialog with the thought of Paul Ricoeur, who in his *Time and Narrative* (1983–85) posits the fundamentally narrative character of human knowledge and identity. In Garstka's hands, Polish culture becomes a privileged domain in which to observe the working out of Ricoeur's theory, for Poland's recurrently “chaotic” present has compelled cultural producers to turn repeatedly toward the past as a reservoir of more-or-less ready made, yet malleable narrative patterns.

In terms of authors, Garstka places on the side of belief in history the early Marxist Jan Kott, the early Marxist Igor Newerly, Catholic writers Hanna Malewska and Jan Dobraczyński, as well as, perhaps surprisingly, refined historical moralist Andrzej Szczypiorski and post-Conradian humanist Jan Józef Szczepański. On the side of the historical unbelievers, Garstka situates the late (ex-Marxist) Jan Kott, ex-Marxist émigré writer Witold Wirpsza, ex-Stalin-era party writers Mieczysław Jastrun, Jacek Bocheński, Jerzy Andrzejewski, and Kazimierz Brandys, national historical anatomizer Władysław Terlecki, proto-post-modernist Teodor Parnicki, and, perhaps surprisingly, poet and essayist Zbigniew Herbert.

Based on this diverse list, one might wonder whether a single opposition can do justice to so many different writers. For instance, despite the fact that Szczepański's historical novels *Icarus* (1966) and *Island* (1968) assume the absence of any transcendental historical foundation, whether God, Fatherland, or humanity, Garstka nevertheless plots him among the “historical believers” for his injunction—*à la* Conrad—to find a higher order within oneself in the form of honesty and reason. This would seem to align this “Catholic skeptic” more with poet Zbigniew Herbert's stance in *Barbarian in the Garden* (1962), in which historical progress is revealed as an illusion behind which stands nothing more than the will to power, yet in which an existential commitment to those disinherited and forgotten by the false master narrative is

nevertheless affirmed. This stance, in turn, would seem to place the poet quite distant from the more purely aesthetic and linguistic projects of other “historical unbelievers,” such as Jastrun, Andrzejewski, and Parnicki.

Yet the sensitivity of Garstka’s readings for the most part belies the starkness of the initial historiosophical opposition and his analytically precocious, nuanced interpretations of various oeuvres should become critical touchstones in international Polish Studies for each of the writers in question. For the book is perhaps best read above all as a rich collection of essays on literary stances in the middle years of communist Poland. Although its title refers to the People’s Republic of Poland in general, and Garstka nowhere discusses the question of periodization, all of the primary texts he analyzes were written and published in the period 1950–78. Moreover, within this period, a pattern is discernible: the majority of texts in which history unfolds according to a master narrative come during the Stalinist years, while nearly all of the historically “unbelieving” texts come after the Thaw, yet before the beginning of the pre-Solidarity ferment in 1976. By highlighting the predilection of writers for relativizing and anti-foundational modes of thought in the period 1956–1970s, the book helps throw into relief the unique discursive universe of these years, so often misunderstood by the later democratic opposition and by post-Solidarity literary and cultural criticism, for which “living in truth” once again become axiomatic.

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Audible States: Socialist Politics and Popular Music in Albania. By Nicholas Tochka. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. xiv, 263 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Figures. Tables. \$99.00, hard cover, \$35.00, paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2018.238

Nicholas Tochka’s ingeniously-titled study of Albanian popular music confirms communism as ontologically authoritarian while challenging the notion of a musically-subjugated citizenry. The innovative study examines mechanisms of state control over artistic choices by engaging with the real lives and music making of individual artists. Along with a historiography of Albania’s popular music (including the pre-communist 1912–45 period), *Audible States* offers an ethnographically-rich and theoretically-coherent analysis of the state’s cultural politics, its governance of prime music institutions, and the roles of leading musicians and supervising bureaucrats in creating modern Albanian music. Particularly noteworthy is the literary quality of Tochka’s narrative: ethnography and theoretical insights are interspersed with story-like vignettes, often enlivened by interview excerpts from the author’s extensive contacts in the field and from archival sources in Tirana collected in late 2000s.

Chapter 1, “Administering Music,” covers Albanian folk music’s modernization post-1945 through the early 1960s, through folk song arrangements and art music adaptations. The Soviet planned economy model provided the blueprint for Albania’s effort to develop its own cultural economy; an effort, the author notes, understood “not as imposition but a common sense solution” (23) to the problem of the population’s backwardness. Tochka explicates the key concept of cultural economy in terms of “accumulation and redistribution” (35) of source materials. Within this highly centralized system of folk song collection and management existed bureaucratic protocols for, literally, harvesting folklore at its village sources (“*bruto* folklore” in the local parlance, 35), transferring it to professional composers in Tirana to be arranged and published, and redistributing the product back into the periphery. The net gain