

The book betrays at times its origins in the Polish academic system. It is occasionally detailed to the point of pedantry. A section on the poetics of censors' reviews includes not one or two, but three definitions of the word "review." At other times, though, Budrowska's anticipation of professorial review board criticisms is to the book's advantage: it is very thorough and she is a scrupulous and careful analyst. A little more context could be provided in places. At one point we read that Stefan Żółkiewski rubbished a book on Polish literary history by Juliusz Kleiner. How significant this was in the greater scheme of things is unclear. How many such textbooks were there? And how many were blocked?

Writers, Literature and Censorship in Poland was originally published in Polish in 2009 and is an oft-cited landmark in Polish scholarship. The translation, by Paul A. Vickers, is good but there are occasional mistakes. "Napastowałem także Stefana Żółkiewskiego" (I also pestered Stefan Żółkiewski) is translated as "I was also imitating Stefan Żeromski" (170). A block quotation on page 138 is incorrectly formatted, making a paragraph from a censor's review look like an interpolation by Budrowska. The English version ends with "Afterword. Ten Years Later." In it Budrowska says she opted against making significant changes for the translation. This decision was justified: her book has not been superseded and is excellent as it is—of great interest not only to Polish scholars but to anyone studying censorship and literature under communism.

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The Storytelling Human: Lithuanian Tradition Today. Ed. Lina Būgienė. Trans. Karla Gruodis. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2020. xvii, 260 pp. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. \$109.00, hard bound.
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Should the KGB term "informant" be used to refer to interviewees? Are Lithuanians the only "folk" in Lithuania? Are Lithuanian Jews "foreigners" in Lithuania? Is Lithuania still "post-Soviet"? The articles compiled in this volume were written at least six years ago, a long time in a rapidly evolving European democracy. Moreover, the essays were originally written in Lithuanian. The Foreword introduces the book as "the first collective scholarly publication in English" whose mission is "to present the state of academic folklore studies in post-Soviet Lithuania" (xviii). What this volume translates to western academic audiences is a struggle to remain relevant as a discipline, and a search for affiliations with other academic fields. As a Lithuanian scholar myself, I understand the difficulty of the country's return to the western academic world after a long break and the limited access of some scholars to English-language academic sources and forums.

In *A Survivor Named Trauma: Holocaust Memory in Lithuania* (2020) Myra Sklarew speaks about twenty years of walking the villages and towns to learn the history of the country from "testimony and reflection" and welcomes the insights of various disciplines to the "study of trauma and memory" (viii). Could the discipline of Lithuanian "folklore studies" offer such insights? After all, Lithuanian small towns and villages, not the cities, were the actual Bloodlands (Timothy Snyder) long hidden from the western world. A few chapters of this volume contribute to memory and trauma studies by including testimonies of Lithuanian witnesses of the 1941 massacres of their Jewish neighbors.

Aelita Kensminienė (Chapter 1) quotes two childhood memories of a Lithuanian woman born in 1933. One is of her Jewish playmate taken away in a truck to a massacre

site, and the other is of the town people splitting up Jewish property. However, the author focuses on the visibility of “the informant’s” narrative style in the first case, and an association with a Lithuanian proverb in her second example (21–23). While the inclusion of such memories may be honest and welcome, their interpretations seem callous towards the Jewish victims. More testimonies by Lithuanian residents are retold by Lina Būgienė (Chapter 4) with a conclusion that “the Jews were good people” (103). The attitudes of her interviewees to the behaviors of Nazi collaborators are those of condemnation and shame, but also of reticence and denial (104). Such testimonies address the trauma of the witness of atrocities, the type of trauma not yet properly acknowledged in Lithuania. The author refers to the brutal massacre of Jewish citizens as “the Jewish tragedy,” however, not Lithuania’s tragedy (105). Similar perceptions of Litvaks as the Other comes across in Chapter 7 by Salomėja Bendoriūtė in the opposition “we-they” (179). The author explains the abundance of “folklore” of jokes about Jews by quoting an outdated myth that “Jews differed from Lithuanians in almost all respects,” including customs (180).

Not only is the mocking of a vulnerable minority unjustifiable; the cultural divide between Litvaks and Lithuanians may be exaggerated. One affinity between the two groups is the attitude to the dead and the places of their eternal rest. The importance of memory, essential to the Jews, and only exacerbated by the Holocaust, is known to Lithuanians from the fiction of Grigory Kanovich, centered around Jewish cemeteries and their guards. One of the novels of this saga about Lithuanian Jewry, *Devilspel*, became accessible to English-speaking audiences in 2020.

In my favorite Chapter 3 of this volume, Daiva Vaitkevičienė, records similar respectful attitudes to the dead in Lithuanian culture, also heightened by the traumatic injustice. In 1988, as Lithuanian independence movement Sąjūdis grabbed the historical chance to restore the statehood, the survivors of Soviet deportations and their descendants saw Russia’s brief democratization as an opening for repatriating the remains of their loved ones. Vaitkevičienė claims that “most of these private journeys are unknown to scholars” (54). She records personal histories of families who exhumed their relatives’ bones with their own hands, in some cases retrieved the remains from ice or wooded areas of the Siberian taiga, and flew them back, often illegally as personal belongings, to their native villages and towns. In this well-written article, Vaitkevičienė convincingly argues that this was a cultural act whose driving force was the traditional belief that the dead must rest at home, and that the survivors are bound by duty to fulfill the deportees’ desire to be buried in the homeland. The author only briefly mentions, and I want to emphasize, the political and humanistic aspects of this act. Even before the declaration of restored independence in 1990, culture-driven private initiatives preceded the official narrative. That such actions were taken privately, silently, and after decades of demonizing the deportees as “criminals,” is a remarkable tribute to humanism that survived Sovietization, and the credit goes to the healthy core and vitality of “folk” culture.

Vaitkevičienė mentions those who could not return: buried in unmarked mass graves (53), or their graves destroyed by construction (54), or the wooden crosses that marked the graves burned (55). Similarly, I would like to note, in Soviet-occupied Lithuania, mass graves of Jewish victims went unmarked, tombstones from Jewish cemeteries were used as building materials, and a huge sports arena was built on the site of the oldest Jewish cemetery in Šnipiškės, Vilnius. A positive development was the 2021 decision of the Lithuanian government to forego the reconstruction of this Soviet building into a modern convention center in favor of turning it into a memorial to Holocaust victims.

Since this collection of articles was “part of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore’s research program” of 2012–2016 (xviii), the material and approaches

represented in the book may not accurately reflect the current memory work, or the state of Lithuanian cultural studies, to which, I suggest, the studies of “folk” or traditional culture belong.

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Gaia, Queen of Ants. By Hamid Ismailov. Trans. Shelley Fairweather-Vega. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press. xii. 198 pp. Notes. \$19.95, paper.
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Among contemporary Uzbek writers, Hamid Ismailov arguably boasts the greatest presence in the west. Several of his novels have been published in English, French, and German, were reviewed in leading journals, and won prizes. And yet, officialdom in Ismailov’s homeland prefers to ignore him—for the last twenty-five years, the writer has maintained a fearlessly independent position as a sharp observer and uncompromising critic of human rights violations in Uzbekistan. Born in 1954 to an Uzbek family in Kyrgyzstan, Ismailov graduated from the Bagrationovsk military school in the Kaliningrad region in 1974, studied biology at Tashkent University, and worked as a translator. In the tumultuous years following Uzbekistan’s independence, Ismailov became a persona non grata. He left Uzbekistan in 1992, settling in Britain in 1994, subsequently working as a journalist and writer-in-residence for the BBC. His literary career began with poetry written in Russian in the 1980s; in the 1990s, he gradually transitioned to writing fiction in Uzbek.

The mere facts of Ismailov’s biography reflect the trials and tribulations of a searching mind thrown into heavy geopolitical turbulences. However, in his artistic work, Ismailov transcends the journalistic framework of his BBC day job: his creative ambitions go far beyond analyzing the political situation in Uzbekistan. Rather, Ismailov aims at an *aesthetic* exploration of the human condition, positioning Uzbek sensibilities and experiences within a modern global context. Conspicuously, *Gaia, Queen of Ants*, begins with a Hesiod epigraph, signifying philosophical ambition that is further developed by a multitude of mythological references. And yet, while avoiding political concreteness, this novel’s artfully composed narrative does not exclude political phenomena per se. Instead, they begin to appear in an unexpected light, bringing the eastern post-communist legacy and western civilizational disorientation to a fascinating synthesis. To an open-minded reader, Ismailov’s prose has the potential to transform perceptions both with respect to Central Asia and the west.

The novel’s central character, Domrul, a thirty-year old Meskhetian Turk, escaped Uzbekistan’s turmoil as a child and now lives in a serene provincial town near London. His encounter with an elderly émigré, Gaia Mangitkhanovna, forces him back into the past from which he fled; the consequences prove to be fatal. Gaia, an arrogant, strong-willed octogenarian hires Domrul as an aide and confidante (officially a “carer” in the British welfare system), secretly expecting him to assist her with suicide at a later time. But first, Gaia recruits the confused young man as her lover. Ismailov’s ability to render the unusual plausible and to verbalize even the most intimate details of that March-December relationship without slipping into sensationalism or morbid voyeurism is masterful. Undeniably, this outrageous relationship has more to do with Gaia’s hypnotic powers than with traditional romantic attraction, and Domrul’s desperate attempts to free himself from the old lady’s spell are bound to fail. Instead, he is increasingly alienated from his Irish girlfriend, Emer Finnegan, who grew up in the