

*A History of Ukraine*—the best history of Ukraine published in English to date—should be the go-to book. Conveniently, the revised edition of *Gates* came out in paperback just a year ago. However, Plokhy's apparent audience for *Frontline*—scholars and graduate students, the readers of *Slavic Review*—would do well to own and read this companion volume. Plokhy even provides endnotes in this book (unlike in *Gates*).

Plokhy here includes twenty-one short essays, divided into four main sections. In the first, he covers many of the controversial issues in the history and historiography of early Ukraine, including the legacy of the Kyivan Rus' and the myth of the Battle of Poltava. In the second section, he includes an essay on the multi-ethnic revolution that we call "The Russian Revolution," some of the early conclusions of his Institute's important Digital Map of Ukraine Project, a pithy analysis of the origins of the Cold War, and an important contribution to the study of the Soviet aggression against Poland at the start of WWII.

In the penultimate section, Plokhy walks his readers through the collapse of the USSR, including serious essays with fun titles like, "The Empire Strikes Back." In the final section, Plokhy explains how the pan-Russian idea cannot serve as an adequate foundation for a modern Russian state, explores Ukraine's quest for Europe, and re-describes and reimagines eastern Europe and the continent as a whole.

Whatever the topic, every essay is thoroughly researched. As a bonus, a maps section includes historical cartography as well as current trends. As a whole, the volume can be read chronologically or as needed for additional context on a particular subject. It is the erudite work of a master scholar at the height of his career.

Indeed, Plokhy is currently the most decorated scholar of Ukrainian history in the west (Mykhailo Hrushevsky Professor of Ukrainian history at Harvard), and he heads the most prestigious institute in the field (Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute). However, he grew up in Zaporizhia, did his bachelor's at Dnipro University, and completed his studies at Peoples' Friendship University in Moscow. His 1983 dissertation was titled, "The Ukrainian People's Liberation War, 1648–1654, in the Latin-language Historiography of the Mid-seventeenth Century." The search for a useable past for independent Ukraine has been his life's work; this volume is just the latest chapter in a longer story—a story that needs to be told and retold, now more than ever.

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***Haiku—Epigram—Kurzgedicht: Kleine Formen in der Lyrik Mittel- und Osteuropas.*** Ed. Christine Gölz, Alfrun Kliems, and Birgit Krehl. Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Mitteleuropa, Band 55. Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2021. 270 pp. Notes. Illustrations. €45.00, hard bound.  
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The title of this compendium rendered in English would be *Haiku—Epigram—Short Poem: Small Forms in the Lyric Poetry of Central and Eastern Europe*. The articles that make up the volume treat short lyric forms as they occur in German, Polish, Russian, Slovak, Czech, and Hungarian poetry. One could argue that the work is esoteric, given its focus on less commonly practiced poetic forms produced in less commonly taught languages. In fact, the volume is unabashedly esoteric, but by no means irrelevant. In the realm of culture, the authors grapple with concepts of minimalism and the avant-garde in relation not only to the written word, but also to the image: photography,

painting, and hybrid forms of text and image. Furthermore, the editors argue that in the realm of politics, small forms, with their tendency toward “the unfinished, unsystematic, and undogmatic” (*das Unfertige, Unsystematische und Undogmatische*), serve a subversive political purpose as they destabilize the dogma-laden legacy of socialist realism that dominated central and eastern Europe in the second half of the twentieth century.

The volume emerged from a workshop held in Berlin in 2016 in conjunction with an exhibition entitled *Die unerträgliche Leichtigkeit des Haiku* (The Unbearable Lightness of the Haiku). The book is divided into four sections. The first, “By Way of Introduction,” presents an interview conducted by Zornitza Kazalarska with the Slovak literary scholar Peter Zajac, and a feuilleton by the German Slavist Heinrich Kirschbaum. Each of these pieces comments on the relation of minimalism to the power of language and the power of silence, and the ability of language to undercut itself. In addition, Zajac provides incisive ruminations on the way the haiku form changes its nature, from elegant to straightforward, to humorous, depending on the language, culture, and context of its production. Kirschbaum ponders the metaphysical meaning of brevity in relation to the work of Czesław Miłosz.

The rest of the book is divided among sections under the headings *Betrachtungen I, Fundstücke, Betrachtungen II* (Considerations I, Found Objects, and Considerations II). Among the various articles in “Considerations I,” for example, Csongor Löincz, in his essay, “X-Rays of the Lyrical Voice: Lajos Kassák and the Early Works of Attila József,” examines the way poetry represents parallels between the revelations of imaging technology and psychoanalysis. In her essay “Multilingualism, or the Small Form of the Lyric: Some Conceptual Considerations (Fridrich—Součková—Mickiewicz)” [N.B., this refers to Iwona Mickiewicz, not Adam Mickiewicz], Alfrun Kliems introduces poems that incorporate words in multiple languages and discusses the concept of “wanderwords”: “words and phrases in other languages that disrupt, enchant, occlude or highlight” the primary language, and can therefore “perform wonders of poetic signification as well as cultural critique” (80). With a title that sounds as if it were invented by Sacha Baron Cohen’s character Borat, Gertraude Zand writes about “Super-Sexdadaism! On the Epigrammatic in the Midnight Edition Series and on the Poetics of Bohumil Hrabal.” Not surprisingly, the poems provided as examples feature anatomical terms in Czech and German that are not typically included in scholarly discussions.

The “Found Objects” section is made up of essays originally published elsewhere. Among these are the Bulgarian poet Ivan Metodiev’s manifesto “Nava-Style” espousing the minimalist form “*nava*.” The bellicose Metodiev asserts, “When a thousand people say, ‘That’s not nava!’ but one person says, ‘That is nava!’ then it is nava” (154). This is followed by the transcript of a Bulgarian roundtable discussion of *nava* under the title “The Law of the Lion’s Tooth (1992): A Discussion from the *Literaturen vestnik*.” The discussion is directed “at both the enemies and the supporters of *nava*” (155) and begins with a debate as to whether *nava* should be defined solely as “*östliche*,” or an eastern European phenomenon, or something broader. “*Östliche*” wins the day, and the discussion moves on from there. One of the most interesting pieces in the section comes from the Czech-German artist-activist Karel Trinkewitz. His essay “Poetry of a Moment and of Eternity” from 1986, here translated from Czech into German, includes what he calls a “Haiku Collage” made up of rows of original sketches and haiku texts in Czech, and a visual “Poem Made from Trash” from 1983, which consists of eighteen squares, each containing a particular type of trash, such as toothpaste tubes, bread slices, perfume bottles, toys, pills, but no text (168–70). The final piece in this section is Czesław Miłosz’s introduction to a volume of haiku poems. The introduction

has been translated from Polish into German, while Miłosz himself translated the haiku into Polish from Japanese and English originals. He acknowledges the difficulty of this effort, concluding, “I simply try to sketch a picture with a few strokes of the pen.... This collection can be considered my private sketchbook given to the reader to develop his own insights” (178).

The section “Considerations II” continues the spirit of “Considerations I,” including several commentaries on the haiku form as such; on “two-liners,” which is to say poems consisting of two lines of verse; and on small verse forms in the “Metamodern” movement. Like the preceding pieces, these articles focus primarily on authors who are not well known outside of eastern Europe.

Overall, the book is a bit of a slog because the context is not well known to Anglophone readers and because the back and forth of translation can be linguistically unsettling. However, the effort is worthwhile. The book provides a number of intriguing perspectives on what a poem actually is, and how poetry relates to the human condition. In a world constantly beleaguered by the complexities of geopolitical life and culture on the vast central and east European plain; we need all the insight we can get.

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***The Vow: A Requiem for the Fifties.*** By Jiri Kratochvil. Trans. Charles S. Kraszewski.

London: Glagoslav Publications, (2021). 290 pp. Bibliography. €21.99, paper.  
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Jiří Kratochvil (born 1940 in Brno) is one of the most prolific and critically acclaimed Czech writers of the post-communist period. He has won numerous literary prizes, most recently the Magnesia Litera for best prose fiction book of the year (2020, for *Fox into a Lady*). Milan Kundera has called Kratochvil’s novels and short stories “the greatest event in Czech literature since 1989.” Until 2021, however, Kratochvil’s work was represented in English translation only by two short stories in anthologies from the 1990s and by an excerpt from his 2002 novel *Down, Beast!* published online in 2014. It was therefore a delight to see the publication last year of a complete English translation of the 2009 novel under review, originally *Slib: Rekviem na padesátá léta*, which is one of Kratochvil’s most ambitious and entertaining works of the past two decades.

*The Vow* tells the story of Kamil Modráček, a Brno architect who aspires to create original buildings in a functionalist style, but reconciles himself to satisfying, by turns, the demands of Nazi authorities in the early 1940s, the vulgar tastes of the Brno bourgeoisie in the mid-to-late 1940s, and the new regime’s commissions for socialist realist housing projects after the communist takeover in February 1948. When his sister dies while under interrogation by the secret police (StB), Modráček vows to seek revenge against Rudolf Švarcšnupf, alias Lieutenant Láska (Love), the StB agent he believes is responsible for her death. A series of coincidences then leads Modráček both to the idea and the means of abducting Láska and imprisoning him in an underground chamber deep beneath the streets of Brno. Further accidents and a kind of obsessive mania eventually prompt Modráček to lock up a whole colony of twenty-one people in the subterranean vault, where he forces his internees to build a “horizontal underground city.” This project becomes both the culmination of Modráček’s ambitions as an architect and a twisted model of utopia: ostensibly a Noah’s-Ark-like refuge from the unfreedom of the Stalinist regime above